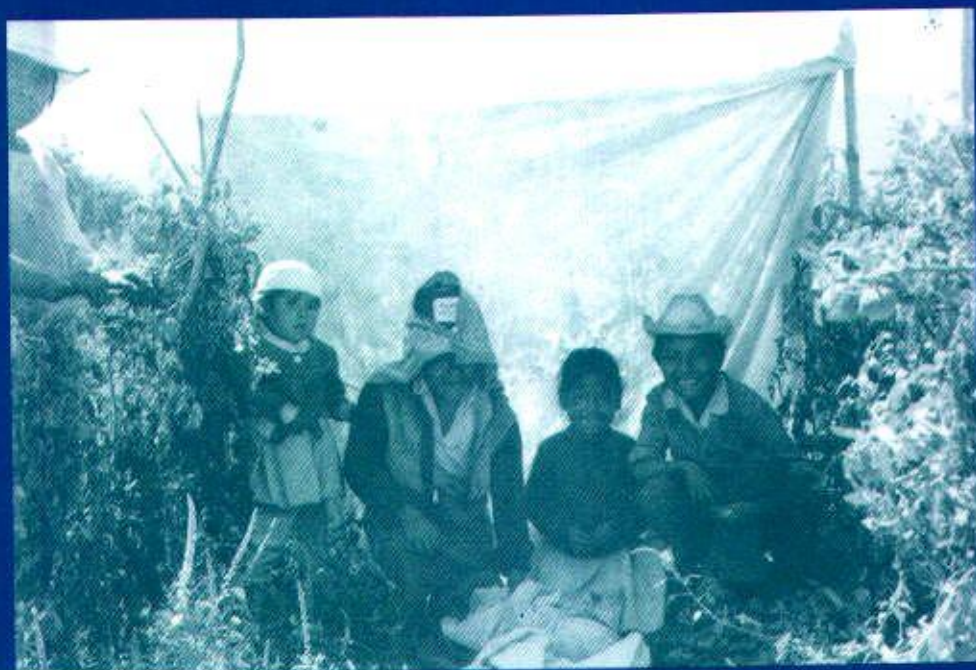


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THE FORCE OF IRONY:

**Studying the Everyday Life of
Tomato Workers in Western Mexico**



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Gabriel Torres

Stellingen

- 1.- There are three ironic outcomes of this research process. First, the researcher ended up with more questions than he began with. Second, the matter of social changes analyzed proved to be a question of words, feelings and hope. Third, although tomato workers appeared subordinated in many ways, questioning their subordination allowed for the deconstruction of the bulk of sociological explanations about workers' subordination.
- 2.- Neither witchdoctor nor expert has the language to predict accurately in what ways or how many times researchers will change their research focus, be confronted with failure or abandon what cannot be explained.
- 3.- The critique of ethnocentrism is not a moral but a political one that stresses how the supremacy of the expert over lay people should not be taken for granted.
- 4.- A sociological analysis is a complex web involving a process of permanent reflection that includes crucial moments (in the field and afterwards) of interlocking theories developed under critical circumstances.
- 5.- Tomato work is a 'localized' and virtually endless range of tasks and subtasks that together make-up the concrete labour process embodying productive and reproductive social, political and economic relationships.
- 6.- Heterogeneity is not a conceptual 'a priori' to characterize people's behaviour, it is a process of reflection underlying specific characteristics appearing in face to face situations.
- 7.- A frequent weakness in the literature on labour process is that the dynamic conditions of tomato work and the heterogeneous characteristics of workers are reduced simply to matters of organizational variation within some general structure of production.
- 8.- Whatever the future scenario, worker initiatives and adaptations (especially in third world countries) will represent a significant basis for negotiating a more sustainable mode of production that can compete with the most sophisticated and expensive models of organization.
- 9.- Power neither explains nor establishes the order of things. Power remains as that which has to be explained by the actions of the others, implying constant variation and an enormous set of combinations. (Latour, 1986)
- 10.- The analysis of workers' disobedience and the issue of power in tomato work contexts are not understandable without considering resistance, which is always present and can emerge from anywhere within the power network.
- 11.- The passivity of workers is a two-fold problem, since at the same time people resist and transform conditions of humiliation.
- 12.- This book offers legitimated profiles of collective behaviour of workers highlighting some relevant aspects of gender, ethnic, and class dimensions in spite of the partial explanation of the relationships between social forms of organization and the individual or group modes of conduct.
- 13.- The notion of 'contingent utopia' is useful to reflect on how workers perceive their prospects (their manifest desires and emotions about how things could be better) from the standpoint of their everyday affairs and accumulated experiences.
- 14.- The understanding of social processes and domination can change considerably if we manage to include in the analysis 'absent characters', 'people disqualified' and 'other logics' ignored by versions of the 'official' truth.

Ontvangen

Gabriel Torres
Wageningen, September 14, 1994

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THE FORCE OF IRONY

**Studying the Everyday Life of Tomato
Workers in Western México**

Gabriel Torres

Promotor: dr. N. Long, hoogleraar in de rurale ontwikkelingssociologie

THE FORCE OF IRONY

Studying the Everyday Life of Tomato Workers in Western México

Gabriel Torres

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PREFACE

Throughout the research process, two paradoxical features of everyday life in tomato work intrigued me. On the one hand, the workers expressed multiple reactions to their exploitative conditions, which ranged from consent to avoidance and resistance. On the other hand, local and foreign entrepreneurs drew upon unstable organizing routines to deal with workers' variable commitment to tomato work. Hence, this thesis concentrates upon the interweavings of two analytical perspectives: one aims to characterize these workers and their capacity for transforming their social standing; the other explores the connections between the local cultural repertoires of both spontaneous and formalized strategies developed by tomato workers and the planned and unplanned social and political tactics introduced by the tomato industry entrepreneurs.

Using the notion of irony as a central concept, I aim to go beyond the paralyzing impasse in which many studies concerning the labour process and workers' living conditions are trapped due to their dependance on deterministic explanations. In the reflective moment of writing this preface, I came to realize that a key factor in my work was to take domination and subordination - as they emerged from the ethnographic narratives - as always contingent and never presenting themselves in exactly the same way. From this perspective I offer a social construction of the complexities of everyday life in tomato workers' routines, showing how, in their fleeting and sometimes highly conflictive social world, workers are sometimes 'illogical' to outsiders' eyes and appear devoid of feelings of inferiority. They are not afraid of their interlocutors' presumed superiority.

Two factors affected me during the writing of this preface: the agitated intellectual debate following the 1994 indigenous rebellion in Chiapas and the collapse of the tomato industry, which I observed in my last visit to the field. I will venture to make an assessment of the immediate consequences of that collapse.

To begin with, the unresolved political issue of Chiapas was difficult to disentangle from my reflections. Those events recalled the discussion of 'extraordinary' changes in Chapter VII of this book. Because those happenings incited my anxiety, I would like to reflect on some points highlighted in the current debates concerning the Mexican political situation. This will help us to

understand the unpredictable but decisive relationships between military operations and political propaganda on the one hand, and indigenous people's transformative capacities on the other. That is, the 'extraordinary situations' taking place at this moment can only be grasped as they are experienced within the extensive and intensive circumstances of everyday life. The 'extraordinary' is expressed in the urgent nature of 'current remarks' made by the different parties involved. Interpretations that until recently would have been deemed exaggerations are now expressions of the ordinary.

I take the eccentric Mexican author Carlos Monsiváis' argument about desacralization to be akin to Bauman's (1992:197) definition of postmodern politics, and I characterize the indigenous conflict as postmodern in order to make a critical reading of it feasible. Monsiváis summarizes his argument by saying, "Mexicans cannot approach dramatic situations without irony and sarcasm" (*Siglo XXI* 13 February 1994:2). He celebrates political cartoonists' ingenuity in portraying the revolt as a sharp alternative voice that subverts official versions presented by the Mexican government and mainstream media. Even if cartoonists cannot overthrow the Mexican government, they become the spearheads undermining the sanctity of the political system. Monsiváis concludes that desacralization is crucial to understanding the different positions within the media battles that concern us all. The postmodern character of the rebellion derives from both global and local effects in various conflictive situations. Specifically, the Salinas regime's exaggerated effort to modernize the Mexican State foregrounds its diminished capacity to cope with popular demands. Monsiváis interpreted the humorous discourse style that *Subcomandante Marcos* (the non-indigenous leader of the revolt) employs even for war as a convincing trope that helps a wide Mexican audience to identify with *Zapatistas*¹ from the poorest and most remote region of Mexico: the Lacandon rain forest.

The rebellion began precisely on the first day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States and Canada entered into effect. Thus in the aftermath of the New Year's Eve *fiestas*, Mexicans awoke to a widely publicized and very surprising domestic indigenous revolt in which over two thousand armed Indians took control of four county seats in the state of Chiapas. It was an ironic comment on the Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's promise to transform all Mexicans into citizens of the First World beginning in 1994. Suddenly, the people ignored by

¹ The guerrilla movement has adopted the name Zapatista National Liberation Army (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN*) in reference to Emiliano Zapata, the famous revolutionary from the early 20th century.

NAFTA acquired a belligerent voice heard nation-wide. In fact, the *Zapatista* rebels' ten demands - work, land, housing, food, health, electricity, education, autonomy, freedom, democracy and peace - became a catalyst for reformulating forgotten claims that other indigenous groups, workers and peasants practically from all regions of México had made.

The situation was highly complicated from the start. This was underlined by dismissals and reshufflings at the cabinet level of the Mexican government. Acts of terrorism and threats to disrupt everyday life occurred in many cities, worsening the situation. After twelve days of confusion, the army determined that the *Zapatistas* movement would require at least six months to put down, so the government opted for a political solution and tried to salvage its prestige by emphasizing peaceful negotiations to end the conflict, and it created at least three special commissions to that end. Severe attacks were launched against institutions previously beyond criticism. These included both the army (for generally ignoring human rights and specifically for bombing civilian populations) and the Catholic Church (for its involvement in politics). Fifteen days after the conflagration began, a cease-fire between the two armies was arranged and unofficial contacts to set up negotiations were made in order to avoid more killings (a record compared to the years required in Central America, Somalia and Bosnia).

The media war intensified when the armed confrontations stopped. Well known intellectuals appeared in many academic forums ready to analyze the conflict and they made their positions clear in the various media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines). Anthropological, sociological and historical knowledge about the five hundred years of indigenous deprivation and resistance in Chiapas was resuscitated. New approaches to the recent problems facing Chiapas' five constituencies became the central issue on the national agenda. These problems included land struggles, the continuing violence against indigenous people, the displacement of indigenous religious minorities, rural out-migration, the bankruptcy of the coffee industry, deforestation and other forms of ecological devastation, chronic conflicts between *Zapatistas* and other peasant organizations, and political collusion between cattle owners and the governing *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). (In 1988 the PRI purportedly won over 90% of the vote in what was to be a future war zone). At the same time, the propaganda of nine candidates vying to win the presidential election programmed for August 21 was virtually ignored.

Some commentators (e.g. Ramírez, Granados Chapa and Aguayo) concluded that the real hostage of the *Zapatista* war was not NAFTA but the electoral process. Thus the hot political issue for Mexican civil society (primarily non-governmental organizations, activists and media workers), the

political parties and government actors was the plea for open presidential elections. In other words, an unconvincing victory for the PRI would no longer be acceptable. The *Zapatistas*' main argument sounded very solid: to silence the weapons, the vote must be legitimate. The critical point in the debate connected with a different meaning of legitimacy. What was at stake was Mexican presidentialism and the PRI's sixty-five years as the State party. At first, the government vainly tried to win the ideological battle by questioning whether the rebellion was truly indigenous or whether the indigenous revolt represented concrete transformations. More specifically, at least three leading government actors, including the President, presented idiosyncratic justifications to demonstrate that the Salinas regime could settle indigenous demands without an armed confrontation. They did this presumably in order to cover up the military operations which were taking place at the same time. They also presented unsubstantiated reports of obscure conspiracies against the government and depicted the movement as headed by Central Americans and Cubans.

It is still too early to draw conclusions about the transformative effects of the various conflicts taking place both within Chiapas and in other states. Yet it is at least clear that the simplistic image of a government-Indian conflict has been overtaken by a more complex image in which cattle owners, tenant farmers and hundreds of peasant and indigenous organizations are actively involved. At the same time, an agreement between the nine presidential candidates and a dialogue between new government representatives and representatives of all the political parties is aimed at reshaping the electoral framework. Regardless of whether they are merely opportunistic or part of a long-term strategy, protests such as land seizures, the takeover of municipal buildings and banks, and prolonged demonstrations are still taking place.

In Jalisco, which is as far from the war zone as Holland is from Spain, many people are involved in the protests and debates. At the University of Guadalajara, there was a very well-attended academic forum which involved some of the main protagonists (including the primary mediator in the war, Bishop Samuel Ruiz, and two members of a special government commission), intellectuals and representatives of the political parties. But the significance of the events did not rest exclusively upon the participants' pre-existing credentials: the emergent properties of actors and new situations was evidenced by the fact that ordinary people participated. For instance, a letter in favor of peace from local school children asked the *Zapatistas* why they killed people. The *Zapatistas* who were participating responded that many children from the Lacandon rain forest die from curable diseases and have no chance to receive an education. These two letters were widely covered by local radio and newspapers and opened up a new debate on peace from children's, parents' and

teachers' perspectives. Students and members of Christian Base Communities went to Chiapas to bring food and other aid to people affected by the war and by aggression from Chiapas' cattle owners and owners of large *ranchos* (farms). Such *rancheros* are prominent in the PRI and hostile to *Zapatistas*. More significantly, members of a regional farmers' movement (*El Barzón*) in Jalisco, which two months before the Chiapas uprising carried out a 55-day protest against neo-liberal agrarian policies and were violently repressed, spent a week in Chiapas to express their solidarity by donating food and other resources to the *Zapatistas*.

I also spoke briefly with some indigenous migrant workers from Chiapas who worked in the tomato industry in Autlán-El Grullo during the last days of my fieldwork at the time of the 1988 presidential campaign. My field notes contain an anecdote which illustrates their social standing. More striking was the racism and stereotypes of them in the region, as well as their ability to turn racist satire against its perpetrators. At that time, it was widely held that the PRI candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, could be defeated. To deal with that eventuality, some local PRI politicians and tomato entrepreneurs agreed to use the workers as voters. They decided to register migrant workers from Chiapas and Oaxaca for the first time (a contradictory way of acknowledging their civil rights). Ignoring legal regulation, these politicians and businessmen registered them at the same address (for instance *Rancho Cobras*). Subsequently the opposition parties vainly denounced this as fraudulent.

On election day (July 6, 1988), the tomato company personnel directors gathered the workers together to give them instructions for a special day of "work" on which their main task would be to vote. If they agreed to vote for PRI they would receive an extra wage payment, lunch, a day off and a party. The entrepreneurs had arranged special transportation to discreetly bring groups of workers to the polling places throughout the day. Later I remarked to one of these workers from Chiapas about how the protests from the opposition seemed to be in vain and how the bosses' manipulation of their votes denigrated them. He laughingly replied,

if the bosses think they can buy us, they're wrong. I know for sure that several workers [he mentioned their names] did everything. For instance they ate lunch, skipped work the next day, took the extra money and enjoyed the party. The problem for the bosses is that nobody can be sure if they got the votes they paid for because the vote was secret. So, when they voted, they did so for whoever they wanted.

As of late January 1994, the Autlán-El Grullo tomato industry is close to disappearing. Of the 1,367 hectares cultivated in 1988, only 150 hectares are

now planted with tomatoes. A mere 30% of the 4,735 workers connected with the tomato industry or other tomato company activities in 1988 are still so employed (see Chapter III). Most of these workers live in nearby communities. The bulk of migrant tomato cutters from other regions disappeared from the local scene after two years. Among the local workers still in the tomato industry are some of the protagonists of Chapters II, III, V and VI of this book, such as Chimino, Rogelio, Ricardo, Alejandro, the women of the greenhouses and part of the Aticama group. But Jeanette, Polo, the jokers, half the engineers and even more students and children of workers are no longer there (Chapters III, V and VI). Under current conditions, local workers have to migrate for at least three months of the year to other regions where the companies still produce. Ironically, the company holding up best is the Arechiga confederation; it is producing almost 60% of the current harvest despite the fact that previously it appeared to be more conservative and slow to introduce technological packages (see Chapter III).

It is not easy to explain the collapse of the Autlán tomato industry. The producers and workers that I interviewed during my last visit offered several different explanations. Some rumored the involvement of entrepreneurs in drug trafficking and subsequent criminal prosecution. Other people commented on technical problems such as uncontrollable viruses and other diseases, a changing micro-climate and declining water levels, and the restricted area available for cultivation. But mostly people emphasized decreasing profitability as the main factor. This is not unique to the tomato industry because bankruptcy is general to practically all branches of agribusiness in many regions of Mexico. Producers place most of the blame for the agricultural collapse on the Salinas regime because of its erratic policies, such as the suppression of subsidies, organizational changes, the uncontrolled importation of products and inputs, and above all the modification of credit standards. The fact is that the majority of Autlán tomato producers have accumulated enormous debts. Some producers face the loss of money and properties because of the foreclosure procedures and criminal persecution decreed by reprivatized banks in coordination with government agencies. It is therefore not surprising that these bankrupt tomato producers joined a cartel of debtors which later became the El Barzón opposition movement, named after a ballad from the revolutionary era.

It is interesting to analyze the changing concerns and sympathies of the members of this emergent organization of agro-producers through successive conflicts. As acknowledged in one of my recent interviews, the majority supported the PRI in 1988 and at least one of the entrepreneurs was directly involved in organizing indigenous workers to vote for Salinas, as described above. There are also indications that some of these producers received massive

financial support from the National Solidarity Programme (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, ProNaSol*), a Salinas programme to allocate resources to the poor. The since-deposed governor of Jalisco (who was caught in a corruption scandal and eventually lost the President's support) quietly carried out this vain attempt to avoid bankruptcy on the grounds that it would save jobs and provide benefits to the region, but it was not enough.

The producers' protests started when foreclosures began in April 1993. Twenty producers organized a march of tractors to the Autlán plaza to demand a solution to the debt problem and they stayed there for a month. This was paralleled by similar protests elsewhere in Jalisco. In Autlán they mainly gained sympathy from large producers and a very few small producers but not from workers. They also maintained the support of the mayor (a member of the PRI, the ruling party) and municipal representatives. As they did not receive any attention from the federal government, they moved the protest to the main plaza of Guadalajara. There they joined with other tractor protestors and quickly won support from practically all sectors of Guadalajara, who were captured by the image of an abandoned rural sector in need of solidarity.

During this phase, at least 3,000 small producers and a considerable number of workers (tractor drivers, truck drivers, mechanics and union members) actively supported the protest. At the same time, it gradually lost support from the PRI's corporate organizations and distanced itself from the Jalisco state government but kept open some direct lines of communication with the President. However, persisting with the tractor procession for over fifty days in an attempt to intensify the protest, they angered the President. This became clear when *El Barzón* attempted to move the protest to Mexico City on the same day that Salinas was to name his successor, in what, for the PRI, is a supreme ritual. At this point the leaders were imprisoned and the tractors were seized.

My research had another paradoxical outcome, as highlighted by the current transformation of *El Barzón*: the only people from Autlán who directly and publicly expressed solidarity with the *Zapatistas* and openly distanced themselves from the President and his announced successor were two large producers who were also leaders in *El Barzón* movement. Considering that Lacandon Indians' living conditions have more similarities with Autlán tomato workers than they do with Autlán tomato producers and entrepreneurs, it would seem more logical to expect sympathy and open solidarity from the former than from the latter. However, as we saw above, it was just the opposite. This case illustrates how a deterministic argument presents more analytical problems than it can solve. Similar situations are recorded in nearly every chapter of the book. Hence the thesis epitomizes the constant effort to understand the multiple logics

which connect the range of workers' behavior to their current transformative capacities. This implies that it is nonsensical to conclude that simply because the tomato workers did not express open solidarity with the Zapatistas that they were backward and politically apathetic. As this book shows, behind apparent subordination and backwardness are multiple possibilities for action and emergent transformative capacities. In the argument that follows I offer an open theoretical approach for analyzing these possibilities.

It is now time to thank the many people who made this book possible. I start by mentioning my mother, who died when I was organizing my fieldwork material in Wageningen. Although she cannot accompany me any longer, I am sure that her spiritual presence pervades all my efforts and that she is there in some ubiquitous point of my bones. There are many tomato workers - the sisters Mily and Lety López, the brothers Juan and Raul Núñez and their father Don Manuel, Don Roberto and many more members of the Núñez extended family; Alejandro Hernández, Chimino Moya, Vicente Morán and Sandra Mata - who trusted me or at least communicated with me throughout my fieldwork. They are not responsible for all what I say about them, but what this book reflects of workers' everyday concerns began in the talks I had with them. Two tomato entrepreneurs (Eusebio Jiménez and Alfonso Arechiga) tolerated my questions, accepted my sociological presence in their companies and for that reason merit my acknowledgement. I am also indebted to the chemical engineer Victor Quintero, the group of student workers and the squad from Teutlán.

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Thanks to my father, brothers and sisters, who were very supportive when we returned to Mexico. I would also like to say thanks to my new colleagues at the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social*, especially Guillermo de la Peña, Luisa Gabayet and Jorge Alonso.

My daughters Ana and Sara continue to be my main reasons for happiness and inspiration. I appreciate very much their love and many forms of solidarity. Last but not least, I would like to reply to Magda that I am ready for more, so are you?

CHAPTER I

SEARCHING FOR NEW WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

Things deprived suddenly of their putative meaning, the place assigned to them in the ostensible order of things (a Moscow-trained Marxist who believes in horoscopes), make us laugh. Initially, therefore, laughter is the province of the Devil. It has a certain malice to it (things have turned out different from the way they tried to seem), but a certain beneficent relief as well (things are looser than they seemed, we have greater latitude in living with them, their gravity does not oppress us). (Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 1980: 61).

The research problems

The postmodern imagination does not like prophets. Within the scope of the scientific work of postmodernist writers one will therefore rarely find forecasts, but one does find language games (Bauman 1992) which are able to tell us 'truths' of the kind that witch doctors, horoscope writers and novelists provide. But neither witch doctor nor expert has the language to predict in any way accurately in what ways or how many times researchers will change their research focus, be confronted with failure, or abandon what cannot be explained.

This is, perhaps, an uncommon way to start a thesis, but maybe it is better to introduce the reader quickly to the uncertainties of doing sociology. All I can promise is to make more explicit some of the difficulties and uncertainties involved. As my Wageningen colleague Ronnie Vernooij (1992) has shown, research processes are indeed full of surprises that transform the course of enquiry. One might also add that as well as being an analytical challenge, the research process makes an imprint on the sociologist's sense of life and creates real uneasiness in dealing with the indeterminism and relativism involved. In my case, if one asked me whether the process of fieldwork and writing a thesis had provoked unease, I would reply yes, and that this was because we play the

special game of forever changing our minds. Involvement in such a game also fits well with a description of how, in the face of new circumstances within fieldwork, daily interaction is reshaped and the questions for analysis are reformulated.

Let me describe here how some reformulations took place. I started with a personal statement of how to do a study of tomato workers in the irrigated area of Autlán-El Grullo.¹ Inspired by Marxist beliefs, I delineated a framework centred upon some preoccupations, such as reinforcing the class consciousness of workers, which implied theoretical assumptions about the problem of false/real consciousness. My agenda included also the intention to show solidarity with agricultural labourers and thus to combine theory with practice. Thus, I was concerned to examine within a broad perspective the conditions of life of various groups of workers focusing on two axes: Specific forms of autonomy and self-organizing processes centering upon what I called 'the development of worker consciousness' (the subjective aspect); and upon the building of contexts (the objective aspect). This implied a description of the constraints, influences, instructions and planning set up by the companies in general and more specifically by personnel at different levels. Assuming such issues to be important, I aimed to identify, in a global sense, the features of the contracting conditions, the forms of subordination, and what I called 'the undesirable routinization of work'. In brief, I wanted to emphasize particularly that workers were living under conditions of subordination and exploitation. So, a central question I had in mind was: Why do workers not rebel?

When I presented the findings of my first three months of fieldwork to the other Mexican and Dutch researchers of the team,² I realised that my central questions and preoccupations with worker consciousness had not worked at all. My supervisor, Norman Long, encouraged me to take a more innovative route, by trying to use people's working circumstances as theoretical scenarios for analysing different working contexts. He pointed to how the dynamic situations in daily work offered interesting points of study. Such a challenge prompted me to imagine what a theoretically-informed ethnography of working processes might consist of. I reformulated the research question by enquiring not of rebellion, but of moments of resistance, and how these moments combined with moments of collaboration. So, I tried to understand the logic of resistance, collaboration, and the mixed situations in which arguments combined in newly emergent working circumstances. But my picture of the situation in the field was still mainly coloured by the partiality of my data, which stressed contemporary forms of coordination within working processes. The inexplicable gap separating 'powerful' bosses from 'powerless' workers at the implementation level and the unsatisfactory dichotomy between systematic

company control and the 'uncaptured' behaviour of workers became a central preoccupation.

A new reformulation came to the fore when I was more aware of the complexities involved and had almost finished the fieldwork. This was grounded in the differences between the circumstances in which people made a living in the work place and their living circumstances in the household and encampment contexts. My focus turned to addressing the problem of how to examine the ways in which workers managed to survive in different circumstances, how they internalized values, and to what extent they used the resources that they brought from and took to the work place. Different routines of work, 'double' or 'triple' working days, gender aspects, differentials of age, ethnicity and the varied ways of using technology in different companies and contexts therefore became topics that drew my attention. Now, at the end of this thesis-writing adventure, I can say that I abandoned neither my preoccupation with examining the behaviour of groups of workers, nor the effects of power differentials, yet I did discover new ways of interacting with workers and experimenting jointly with them in new forms of understanding working practices.³ By using 'an actor-oriented perspective' (Long 1992), I reshaped these preoccupations and was able to build a theoretically-informed ethnography (see also de Vries 1992).

By renewing questions and remaking texts, I gradually became more aware that my thesis was directed towards offering a social construction of the complexities of everyday working circumstances, based on social interaction with workers in the tomato fields. It aimed also to analyse issues of asymmetrical power/knowledge relationships which emerged within working contexts. Readers can judge for themselves how far I got with such a perspective.

A shift in worker studies

After Burawoy's book, *Manufacturing Consent* (1979), it became clear that a shift in the theoretical trend of worker studies - which for many years had been grounded in 'knowledge' about the extraction and obscuring of surplus value - was necessary. Sociological studies of workers became less attractive to a wide sociological audience and became trapped in the confined subdisciplines of rural and industrial sociology. Marxist studies of the 1960's and 1970's had failed to demonstrate whether and how the consciousness of workers was prompted by exploitative practices. Their focus on collective class behaviour and the search for alternative ways of interrelating theory and practice, driven by a desire to reinforce workers' political organizations and to seek better living conditions for

them, failed to take account of, or understand how, other forms of solidarity are expressed within the household, neighbourhood and community. Hence the different histories and patterns that made up social networks, family ties, and a diversity of cultural identities, were often not included in the analysis.⁴⁾

This shift of theoretical interest can also be linked to global changes such as the decline of the labour movement and the failure of Communism, which was previewed theoretically by Andre Gorz (1980) in his famous *Adieu aux Proletariat* in which he showed that the collective appropriation of the means of production and the command of society by proletarians did not work. More concretely, Bourdieu expressed his disenchantment with the 'descriptions of the most alienating working conditions and the most alienated workers'. He found them 'so unconvincing - not least because they do not help to explain why things are as they are and why they remain as they are - that is ... they fail to take account of the tacit agreement between the most inhuman working conditions and men who have been prepared to accept them by inhuman living conditions' (1981: 314).

To come to terms with this 'tacit agreement' invoked by Bourdieu, we must take into account what Giddens calls 'the pragmatic/ironic/humorous behaviour of distanced workers participating in the routines of alienated labour'. Giddens also suggested that in studying power relations in work situations we have to consider that 'power relations are two-way ... [that is] all human relations manifest autonomy and dependence in both directions ... however wide the asymmetrical distribution of resources involved' (1979: 148-9). This is Burawoy's starting point for bringing together an ethnographic and theoretical analysis of what he calls the 'politics of production', which stresses the spontaneous ways in which workers express consent to coercive situations in shaping the productive process. Interrelated concerns, such as how workers make a life for themselves in the 'alienated conditions' of work can portray at the same time how different cultural repertoires are locked into the domestic and work situations. These concerns epitomize new ways of looking at workers everyday life circumstances and imply discarding from the outset 'the view that workers are somehow irrational in their responses to work' and abandoning 'a narrow emphasis that insists that workers only lean toward economic rationality' (Burawoy 1979: 4). In other words, we cannot hope to get intellectual inspiration for a fresh sociological focus on workers by calling for new covers to present old problems or by resuscitating fossilized concepts. The way out is to learn how to deal with the complexities of the worker's everyday life.

Playing with ethnocentrism

Foucault (1977) maintained that the worldwide upheavals of 1968 taught the masses that they no longer needed intellectuals, that they knew and could express things for themselves. Later Baudrillard (1988) takes up this argument from another angle and argues that the almost enforced silence of the masses within the media (TV, newspapers etc.) gives the impression of an ignorance or passivity on their part, but this is only an 'appearance', an 'obscene appearance', that should not be underestimated since no one can predict what will be its last face. He argues that it is in fact easy to see when power is lacking or has been abandoned, but not easy to observe hidden power or to predict when it will emerge, or to see ways of compromising with power. This also implies that the idea of finding a single context for all human lives should be abandoned (Rorty 1989). Thus, our approach to analysing the mysteries, ambiguities, contingencies and trivia that Baudrillard observed as the behaviour of the masses, has to change. In my own case, my task was to look closely at the behaviour of actual groups of workers, in this case tomato workers, and specially to see how far they are able to delegitimize in concrete situations the plans and policies of those apparently in power. Such behaviour Scott (1990) calls the 'often fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups'. He identifies rumours, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures and jokes as features through which they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity (being the masses) or behind innocuous meanings of their conduct. In fact, it is the reality of the enormous potential behind the anonymity of the masses that sometimes worries or at least attracts the attention of rulers everywhere. This is what lies behind discussions on ethnocentrism. As Derrida argues (in Turner 1989: 15), ethnographers (researchers), willingly or not, are ethnocentric. Hence some sort of ethnocentrism is unavoidable. But, on the other hand, this might be considered as 'desirable', denoting the researcher's belief that her or his 'effort to generate knowledge' and exercise 'scientific skills' can add some understanding, or at least offer novel accounts on the matters she or he is researching. However, ethnocentrism can also be seen as a disparaging outcome of a research process. This is what Turner addresses when he portrays the ethnocentric researcher as a 'kind of inquirer acting as social physician diagnosing troubles and inventing remedies' (1989: 28). Thus, the critique of ethnocentrism is not a moral but a political one, arguing that it takes for granted the supremacy of the expert over lay people.

In studying tomato workers the discussion of the different ways of looking at ethnocentrism is of great concern. A question which fits perfectly with the above derogatory connotation of ethnocentrism, is whether it is possible from

research findings to change political situations, or to invoke certain models which have worked in Europe, for example, for resolving or ameliorating 'poor' living conditions in Mexico.

In 1944, Orwell turned his critical eye towards imagining developments in the world in 1984. Rorty (1989) acknowledges that Orwell's statement, 'human equality is technically possible but practically infeasible', characterizes well the ambivalence of the achievements of modern science. The Orwellian perspective is an ironic one which is still useful in addressing prevailing scientific rationalities that place preoccupations such as the achievement of maximum goals, and not 'trivial discussions' such as the everyday life of agricultural labourers, as central. In fact, questions such as food security, sustainable development, global ecology, healthy ecosystems, perfect profitability, total automation and informatization, increasing efficiency and expertise, are at the top of the agenda in most expert circles. From this angle, futuristic projections of more comfortable working conditions rest upon the design of more sophisticated glasshouses where machines and computerized systems will do their best for starving people (earlier conceived of as 'the happy poor') and where the role of workers (transformed into happy future robots) is cast as pushing different buttons within the confines of the new international centres of production. Although robotization of agricultural labour is still in its preliminary stages, future designs for organizing productive processes will implicitly expect new types of agricultural labourers to be familiar with new ways of increasing mechanization. This means also that the new types of agricultural workers will no longer be willing to do the hard tasks taken over by machines.

In the meantime, we can observe the greenhouse, which is becoming the common condition for producing tomatoes in Holland and Germany, as a highly successful technological development, where it is possible to admire the high degree of control over nature reached by different kinds of experts and farmers. Adversities of production such as bad weather, diseases or viruses, physical destruction, and changing markets are no longer considered a burden. However, agricultural labour *is* still conceived of as onerous, and at times a dangerous activity⁹, if not for everybody, then at least for many of those explicitly or implicitly considered as the lowest skilled female or male agricultural workers. The failure to abolish some of the inherent harshness in agricultural labour is not only due to earlier developments to attain the goals of automation, efficiency and increasing standardization, but to the ironic side of technological and social progress which persists in teaching us that the aim of better living conditions for the masses of workers is problematic and unlikely. Or perhaps, what is more ironic, is that the social engineering of current and future societies is trapped in the bottlenecks of the dilemmas and dichotomies created by these same social

engineers. In fact, attempts to design better human conditions for everybody can easily become a *modus vivendi* and sometimes a profitable business, without being particularly associated with the poorest groups or beneficiaries.

If it is the case that we cannot be very optimistic in thinking that the burden and exploitation embedded in agricultural work will be abolished in the face of new technological and social developments, perhaps we can find hope in learning from past experiences which dealt with similar conditions. Taking a step backwards to the eighteenth century, one can read, not in the form of narrative Orwellian fiction, but in the realm of historical report, the case of British farm workers interpreting - under the fear of unemployment - the invention of the new cultivator machine as an enemy that they had to destroy (Hobsbawm & Rudé 1969). One cannot predict that a similar situation will never happen again, but for tomato growers in countries like Mexico, building complex greenhouses is surely not a generalizable alternative.

Let me give an illustration of the inherent ambiguities found in the most sophisticated ways of implementing agriculture, and the implications behind this situation in terms of values, legal frameworks and equality. Recently, a report in the NUFFIC Bulletin (Newsletter: NUFFIC Boletín, NL 6/ 92, Feb 13/1992) revealed that in the surrounding areas of Den Haag, where maybe the most developed greenhouses of Holland exist, there are an estimated 15-30,000 illegal migrant workers, who receive 80% less in wages than their Dutch counterparts and who have practically no rights. The Bulletin stressed that 'illegal immigration put many legal immigrants out of work'.

This report shows how the economic situation and the asymmetrical power relationships of the migrants (legal and illegal) are used without scruple in the most technologically sophisticated agriculture. Despite the 'objective language' used in the Bulletin, it takes a position which supports a solution which is not neutral (for more details see Annex 1). In defining the problem, the report mainly blames the owners of the horticultural industry who do not comply with regulations, and the *illegal* immigrants, and only implicitly suggests a critique of the complacent police. The 'passive' *legal* migrants are totally absolved, and the report makes no mention at all of how the regulations on migration and labour are not being observed. It is interesting to observe that with the ethical condemnation of the owners of the greenhouses, the report in fact conceals unequal practices and takes a bet in favour of a theoretical equality of the law which attempts to offer full employment to legal migrants, without acknowledging the complications of the multiracial character of Dutch society. The report also says nothing about the ways in which these migrant workers manage to evade Dutch legal regulations, nor about their need to survive here and their self-enrolment in the greenhouses.

This situation is a complex one which looks at some implicit aspects, and stresses the need to abandon single contexts and raises doubts about the general application of legal solutions. The idea of an abstract legal equality as argued in this case refers to Western conceptualizations of equality and alienation. In the sense used by Marilyn Strathern elsewhere (1988: 142), equality denotes the case of people 'owning' the work they do, and alienation the separation of a person from her/his work. However, as Strathern convincingly argues, these are not universal dogmas, but are ambiguous in character and socially constructed in many ways within different contexts. Mostly it is the case that discussions⁶ on equality and inequality and their ethical implications are underpinned by their initial assumptions. Hence concepts such as property, exploitation, models of social life and standards of living are taken almost for granted and subsequently linked to the process of evaluation.

In the case of tomato workers, one can argue that it is easy to observe big differences in income and living conditions between bosses and workers. This, however, does not necessarily imply the need to take as a starting point certain predefined categories and stereotypes of desirable or undesirable standards of life, though neither should it imply accepting a complacent attitude and ignoring all evident disadvantages. Nor should one view a worker's life as being denigrated through the reproduction of 'totalitarian' types of conditions for workers (that exist, for example, in the company-owned migrant encampments) comparable to Goffman's (1961) account of the working of 'total institutions' such as asylums.⁷ Thus, while not ignoring aspects of cruelty or exploitation, one has to acknowledge that working situations can at the same time be flexible and spontaneous environments (see also Newby 1977: 289). All this suggests that it might be more useful to analyse what workers do and how they attribute meaning to their lives and work than to focus merely on income or status differentials, or whether or not they should own the means of production. In any case, it is necessary to unmask in the different contexts how the idea that human beings are equally free and autonomous is reproduced.

Building a local theory

Both in everyday reasoning and in sociological theorizing, agricultural labourers are often reified or caricatured as a social group. This arises in part because they tend to be less visible due to their assumed subordinated and stigmatized social standing (Newby 1977: 11; Paré 1980: 7; Grammont 1986: 7). Within the region in which my research was carried out, there are currently many such images of agricultural workers, held by different groups. First, we have ideas

emanating from people such as the managers of the tomato companies, the large-scale farmers or the officials of the sugar mill, among whom (and of course I do not mean to imply that they all think the same way) we generally find the opinion expressed - though it may range from an extreme racist to a more moderate attitude - that agricultural workers are 'genetically handicapped' or at least not able to organize the production process themselves. Another view - a paternalistic assessment - considers workers as starving people who can be redeemed through the jobs that entrepreneurs create (González, forthcoming). A third, more pragmatic view, treats workers as a 'necessary commodity', as manageable and reducible to the 'number of hands', without any further consideration for their legal status as workers or their right to certain minimally acceptable living conditions.

Despite these degrading attitudes towards workers, the scarcity of such 'hands' is sometimes so severe that the continuity of production can only be secured by involving some workers in what are normally regarded as managerial tasks. In order to compete for the best hands, some entrepreneurs offer better pay, housing, transport, cheap food or cheap loans to some workers who then become a privileged minority and develop close relationships with the entrepreneurs and managers. In contrast, when conflicts between employees and employer arise, for example over low wages, bad working conditions, maltreatment and so on, employers circulate derogatory comments about workers' loyalties, the validity of their claims and the legitimacy of their leadership. This tactic is often used to justify the treatment and sacking of workers through labelling them as 'a small minority of rebellious workers', 'political agitators', 'corrupt leaders' or 'communists'.

There are also so-called 'progressive' groups (often affiliated to the Catholic Church) in the region who depict agricultural workers as 'the poorest of the poor', especially vis-à-vis the *indigenas* (i.e. those belonging to recognized Indian ethnic groupings) who come from other regions. In addition, some of the students and members of the elite families related in one way or another to the industry, express disapproval of the sanitary habits of some workers and disseminate the image that they act like 'half-animals', because they collaborate least in the public health campaigns to clean up the barracks where they live. Other students, farmers and workers, who sympathize with the cause for more freedom for agricultural workers, see the life conditions imposed on them by their bosses as 'slave-like', which they believe can only be eliminated by changing the whole political system.

Workers themselves, of course, also express a particular consciousness of their situation, even to the extent of using derogatory labels for themselves, which they twist to give connotations that are ironical, in that they convey both

a sense of the acceptance of their status whilst challenging the premises on which they appear to be based (for details, see Villarreal 1992: 253). Then there are those workers who regret what they call the 'backwardness' and 'cowardice' of their workmates. They point to political struggles occurring at other times or in other places, which eventually ended in the repression of the minority and the disorganization of the majority. Other workers appear resigned and desperate, because they feel that as *jodidos* (i.e. poor who are in a way condemned to their fate) they have no future without these jobs. Workers' images of trade unions and their institutional modes of defence are viewed almost unanimously as having little clout, as weak, or as bureaucratic and corrupt at the workers' expense.

There are in fact relatively few sociological studies of agricultural workers, most falling into a kind of 'committed sociology'. Those I have examined⁹, frequently contain ethical judgements and denounce existing situations or raise new issues for academic and political discussion and for social action. They range from 'revolutionary' perspectives that believe in the political role of rural workers as a proletariat (Paré 1980) to more pessimistic approaches that view rural workers as 'human commodities that cannot think' (Astorga Lira 1985: 118), or as 'politically powerless' (Danzinger 1988) or as 'deferential workers' (Newby 1977) who accommodate to the status quo. What is neglected in most of these studies is an account of the world that, to paraphrase Genovese (1972), 'the slaves themselves made'. Their predominant focus is instead on 'the world that made workers into slaves'. Such approaches see the sources of social change as external and global in nature. As Danzinger expresses it, referring to Newby's passage 'the only hope for a "dramatic improvement" in farm workers' life chances lies in external political action, including legislation, and through the decisive intervention of external agencies' (1988: 8). Thus, a contradiction remains within such 'critical discourses' aimed at convincing a national audience that this type of 'slave system' should be eradicated in order to promote the fuller incorporation of rural workers into society at large: nowhere within it are the ordinary logic, endeavours and possibilities developed by the 'victims' of this status quo taken into account.

Evidently, all concepts and even caricatures highlight some aspects of the social circumstances in which agricultural workers live, and make some sense of the context in which particular representations are produced, but we cannot theorize on the basis of simply filling in the parts to complete the puzzle. As Deleuze has said:

'we are in the process of experiencing a new relationship between theory and practice ... practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another... Who speaks and acts?

It is always a multiplicity even within the person who speaks and acts. All of us are "groupuscules". Representations no longer exist; there is only action - theoretical action and practical action which serve as relays and form networks.. We have no choice but to make new theories' (1977: 205-7).

In this sense, as Foucault concludes in his discussion with Deleuze, 'theory does not express, translate, or serve the application of practice: it is practice. But it is local, regional and non-totalizing. This is a struggle against power where it is most invisible and insidious' (1977: 208). In other words, to distinguish a society or a social group, theory should never be restricted to the dominating face of power; from this perspective the analysis of mechanisms and positions of power will always be insufficient. Thus, theory must work with more fluid ways of understanding power/knowledge processes within contextualized dialogical relations in which multiple cultural repertoires overlap (see Villarreal: forthcoming). Moreover, the grounds for such a theory should avoid speaking patronizingly for others, because only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on behalf of themselves.⁹ Therefore, my main objective throughout this thesis will be to concentrate on exploring the 'practicalities' of the everyday social situations of tomato workers and the interactive dialogues between them and researchers.

The focus on the different practices of irony

In building a 'local theory' as outlined above, I believe it is important to concentrate on an analysis of how the networks formed by theory and practice are mutually shaped. In the chapters that follow I explore how this relates to other specific concepts and situations (the politics of fieldwork, the nature of tomato work, tomato work politics, the effects of power/knowledge). This means, on the one hand, coming to terms with the multiplicity and 'groupuscular and interlocking nature' (to use Deleuze's expression) of people taking part in social interactions, and on the other, looking at the connectedness between what people do in specific scenarios and their own reflections on these practices. One way of doing this is to examine what I call 'practices of irony'. To understand practices, I start with Bourdieu's (1977) definition of practice as a cognitive operation or execution in the performance of tasks and implementing of plans.¹⁰ This means that in all practice, know-how is implicit and uncovered through the actions of people in specific situations. Agents' thoughts, gestures, emotions, perceptions, and actions reflect the working of different practical logics. Practical logics allow us to deepen our understanding of the different actors intervening in everyday life contexts. Human agents appear in

sociological texts as objects of observation, as categories, as data and discourses related to specific situations; but these data, categories, etc, become meaningless when disassociated from the human agency that lies behind these.

Knowledge is thus a shared enterprise, present in all practice, which, to some extent, is an effect of the agents' action and the social interrelations involved. In a study of the complex processes of managing a medium-sized irrigation infrastructure, van der Zaag (1992: 5) describes how social interaction as practice is highly revealing of the pattern of relationships. He argues that:

'by the concept of "social interaction" we mean the processes which ensue when people come together and exchange goods, words or shared experiences. Social interaction, more than practice, is a dynamic concept since it acknowledges that when people come together a middle-ground emerges which cannot be wholly reduced to the constituent parts of the interaction. Social interactions thus have an emergent nature' (Long 1989; cf. Sayer 1984: 113). Outcomes of interactions consequently may be unexpected'.

Hence, knowledge resulting from interaction is dynamic and reflects the heterogeneity of the people interacting. Newby (1977: 289, 387) recognizes the dynamics and variability of social practice when he characterizes farm workers' practices in England 'as never the same two days running' and goes on to explain that farm workers in England 'lacked any single abstract model of society which constituted their entire social consciousness. Instead many seemed to operate with a multiplicity of images...beliefs and opinions which did not add up to any simple coherent image'. The same applies in the case of Mexican farm workers, and I use their deployment of irony to demonstrate this. Although I adhere specifically to some philosophical conceptions of irony,¹¹ I prefer to deal with practices of irony contextualized in different working circumstances. This presupposes situated practices which are 'never the same two days running'. My purpose is to study how diverse practices express different forms of conceiving irony and how these are embodied within different contexts.

Thus, I use irony as an 'analytical perspective'¹² for grasping what Kundera calls the 'devil' in laughter, for looking differently at 'the prevailing order of things' (in my case the order of things as they are reflected in work situations). This of course implies extending the search for meanings beyond those openly expressed in tomato work contexts. It entails scrutinizing what we can understand from their dreams and comments about future projections, and an exploration and analysis of the ambiguities in the descriptions of the 'status quo' of tomato workers. As we saw in the previous section, different versions

of the 'status quo' coincide with an interpretation that sees at least some of the tomato workers as people who are backward and out of step with the world of progress. However, I also suggested that this interpretation has more to do with problems inherent in a 'native' in contrast to a 'Western' way of interpreting and conceptualizing standards of life and equality, and with an ideological bias that believes in the superiority of the expert world.

By focusing on irony within social interactions, I can embrace what I call 'ironic conditions' or 'ironies of life' and the different practices of irony embodying 'states of mind' and 'figures of speech' that individuals or groups of workers and staff enact within different everyday life situations. The notion of 'ironic conditions' embraces both researchers' constructs and workers' everyday images and formulations of the history that weighs upon them. In other words, the idea conveys the aggregated conditions that are beyond the capacity of individual and group wills to control. Of course, the implicit or explicit reference to 'ironic conditions' found throughout this thesis, should not be taken to imply that such are the same and equal for all people, which might be argued in the case of structural constraints that are assumed to determine the same outcomes for everybody. What is argued is that the 'ironies of life' express the different ways of dealing with the immediate perspectives of 'living without radical alternatives' or in other words 'living by coping with or tolerating what appear to be "some improved conditions"' ¹³⁾. If it is true that different working contexts mostly reflect power differentials this should not imply a conception of these as definitive. Neither, despite company promises or workers' dreams, should the opportunities for avoiding what might be interpreted as dangerous or heavy work be considered easy for the majority of agricultural workers. This is the reality for most workers, but irony allows them to play with the idea that although apparently nothing changes, yet there is room for change and other outcomes that can be lived with, for free action, joy, resistance or, if not openly, then at least 'fugitive' behaviour.¹⁴⁾ It is such 'appearances' (offensive to any humanitarian credo) alluded to by Baudrillard (1988) which are endlessly ironic, not because they are mysterious in nature but because changes in such situations are not easy to appreciate since they revolve around small margins and minor matters. Furthermore, changing situations, as presented by workers in different ethnographic contexts, sometimes take the form of words or feelings that give hope without really improving material conditions.

Nevertheless, within these margins, new agreements and settlements concerning work emerge which signify renewed forms of consensus, coordination of tasks and ways of complying with the intended plans of work and dealing with the unintended consequences of actions. They are not fantasies

but implicit in the assumptions behind concepts that emerge during a given social process, including the fieldwork encounters themselves. Of course it is possible that the theoretical effect of the research could drive the researcher to see the objects of analysis (the researched) as always more clever, more ingenious and maybe more cynical than him/herself (the researcher) (Baudrillard 1988). I will touch upon on this point later in Chapter II. Ironic conditions may also be seen in relation to the limitations for researchers themselves. The differentials between them and their objects of study (the researched) offer no more than a circumscribed understanding of their life conditions. Thus, eventually, from the perspective of studying ironic conditions, sociological research becomes a double track of different interconnecting practices of irony - those of the researcher, the workers, the staff, etc.

Perhaps it would be impossible to register statistically all the different practices of irony because of their enormous variation and the difficulty in configuring them precisely. However, it is interesting to examine the nature of different practices of irony and to examine their inherent potential for criticism, which in Kierkegaard's (1965: 340) terms, 'seek to balance the accounts' or, in Woolgar's constructivist approach, are useful for maintaining the ambivalence of things that can never be known for sure (Woolgar 1983: 260). This brings us to examine what we consider as the analysis of 'states of mind' and 'figures of speech' within different practices of irony.

Rorty (1989) regards irony as the continuous doubt about the final vocabularies of people (i.e. words to justify actions, beliefs and lives). This suggestion offers a methodological entry point for exploring these variations in the ethnographic accounts as ephemeral but contextually grounded. The difficulty in dealing with practices of irony is that they are mainly expressed in words, in gesture and in circumstantial attitudes and contexts which may not convey the same meaning to all people. If one has a refined and attentive ear one might hear all the words, or with a sharp eye one might follow all the actions, but both actions and words often have a fleeting life. For this reason, situational contexts that embody ironic conditions give us a more specific interactive setting and help us to avoid the risk of analytical arbitrariness. The latter is perhaps the case with the use of irony in literary criticism, where it has been used as an umbrella concept, covering an enormous range of perspectives, involving many different things, to such a degree that it can end up as largely meaningless. Woolgar (1983: 248) criticizes the theoretical weakness of what he calls the blandest formulation of irony denoting 'a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed'. However, this difficulty does not mean that in order to avoid the risks, we have to opt for definitively given or fixed schemes of interpretation. We can still agree that grasping ironic

conditions can be done through observing situations over a lengthy period of time or in recurrent circumstances as I was able to do in my research. Here it was possible to observe specific aspects of 'ironic conditions' and group different interlinking group situations where a series of practices become organic or at least start to make sense. Nonetheless, we have also to maintain doubts about equating these 'ironies of life' with structural constraints. Further, we have to deny the power of irony as an explanatory principle, even though we can recognize the contextual nature and dynamic that it provides for the understanding of different actions and situations.

What I propose to do in the chapters that follow is to build a picture of the 'contextualities', implicitly or explicitly, of the different practices of irony by paying attention to the meaning of 'states of mind' and 'figures of speech' which, as I suggested above, have a fleeting life. In Chapter VI, I develop this argument in more depth. It would be intriguing to know if people do what they say, and further, if what people do and say squares with what they think, but perhaps this is a metaphysical enquiry that would get us nowhere. What I can show, through momentary and recurrent practice, is people picking up and interpreting contexts and speaking about their ways of thinking. This is, for instance, what I interpret from the description of the different practices of irony provided by Kierkegaard (1965). He argues that through 'contextualities' we can build up different aspects of what we may call 'states of mind': in the relationships between people who are in opposition or subordination to each other; in the way people define and behave with different audiences; and among categories of people who behave as the target of others as witnesses, comrades and collaborators, or among those who attempt to proselytize, or who become convinced etc. Kierkegaard refers also to scenarios such as circles in which intellectual protocol is implicit. In relation to 'speech figures' and the meaning behind them, he mentions style of language as a pointer to observing underlying politeness, subtle attack or plain conspiracy. However, he shows that 'states of mind' and 'figures of speech' combine when some attitudes such as negative gestures, mockery of self and others, dissemblance, feigned acceptance or defensive refusal come to the fore. Thus, he points out also that more subtle uses of irony reveal complex ways of combining the two, such as in the case of questioning used to humiliate, forms of answering used to infuriate, overbearing actions done to repulse, or making diagnoses and dialectics as weapons for revealing weaknesses. I would also like to add the point that states of mind can be more fixed than the fleeting moments of ironic behaviour or language.

Although Kierkegaard's approach to characterizing the different practices of irony is useful, what I have developed in Chapter VI cannot be seen as a

reflection completely free of ambiguities. Perhaps I should admit in advance that it was impossible to avoid becoming trapped in the confusions of contemporary sociological discussions concerning actor (action) and structure (context)¹⁵. Eventually, I evaded the solution of making a bid for one or the other. By placing 'practices of irony' alongside 'people in context', I explore how contextualities are prompted by actors within ethnographic scenarios. My challenge is to offer sounder reflexive understanding of the theoretical issues involved in working situations. I develop a summary of these reflections in Chapters VII and VIII. Of course by focusing on irony we cannot expect to solve all theoretical problems but only to gain some grip on the understanding of what Kundera perceived as things that are 'less heavy and oppressive than they appear'. At least it is hopeful to think that by leaving behind heavy conceptual frameworks, we can achieve a more lively dialogue with flesh-and-blood tomato workers.

The setting and research procedures

The valley of Autlán-El Grullo (where the interactions under analysis in this thesis took place) is a region located 200 kms from Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco and 100 kms from the Pacific Coast (see Figure I). In this valley and its mountains, as the local poet romantically believed (Rubin 1987), those who die of starvation do not merit burial, because of the quality and abundance of all the fruits, legumes, crops and trees that grow or could be produced there ¹⁶. In fact, the impressive landscape of the valley, enclosed at its four poles by the Sierra Madre Occidental (the major chain of mountains of the Mexican Republic), encapsulates a privileged warm weather climate that natives believe is the best in the world (Rubin 1987: 14). The privileged natural setting is favoured also by the generous land mass (more than 20,000 hectares in the irrigated area and its surroundings) and enormous access to water (in rivers, small streams and irrigation channels) which run across the valley¹⁷ from one extreme to the other. More than twenty small villages (with populations ranging from 500 to 3,000 inhabitants) are spread throughout the valley and belong to one of the two municipalities whose headquarters are located in the two main towns (Autlán with more than 30,000 inhabitants and El Grullo with more than 15,000). The topography and architecture (mostly composed of fragile dwellings) of the villages and neighbourhoods of the towns portray both the roots of the historical-political processes of agrarian and technological developments, and adaptation to geological and hydrological conditions. Observing the panorama from each of the high points on the three roads which

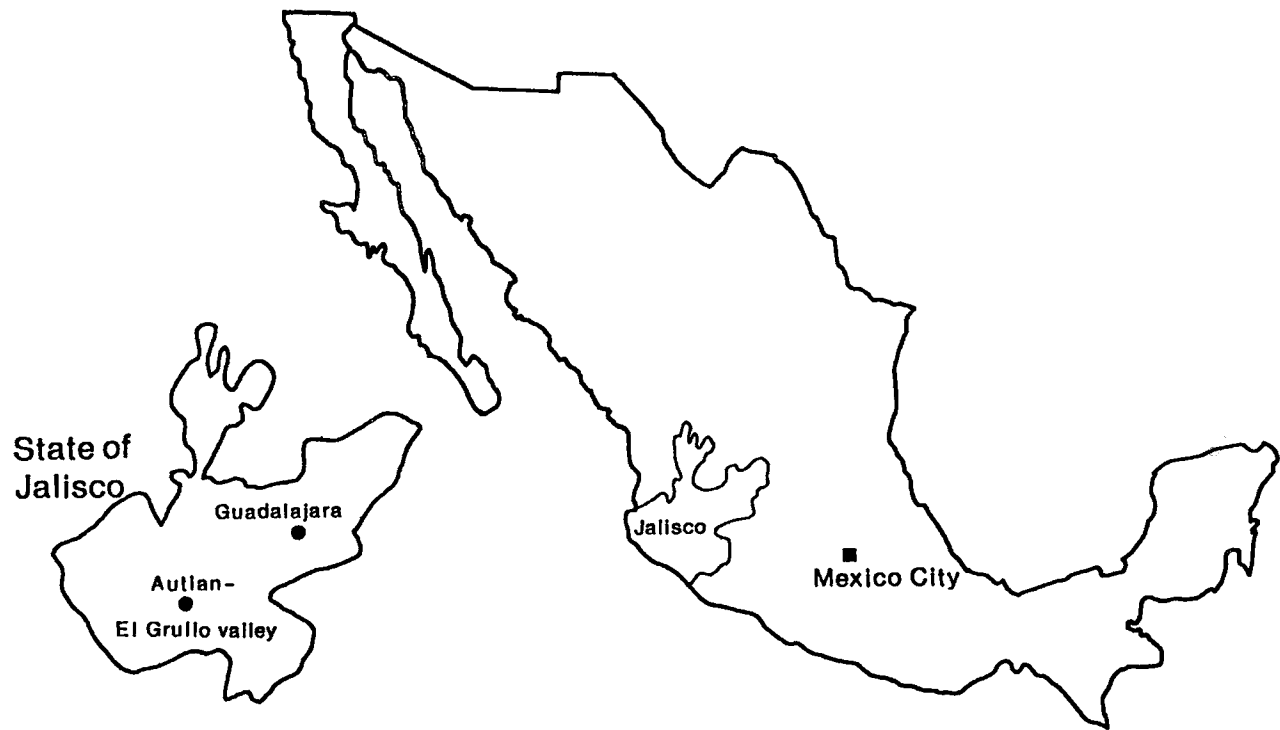


Fig.1. Research setting

communicate with other regions, the irregular pattern of villages and towns appears to be snuggled into and half-hidden in the mountains, vying with the land for cultivation.

In an impressionistic description of the region by a Dutch researcher (Van der Zaag 1992: 10), the *coamil* fires on the mountain sides cultivated by the hundreds of poor landless people, and the huge black columns of smoke produced by the thousands of tons of sugar cane to be harvested, are new pictures which blend with the traditional image of the privileged and balanced nature of the region. In fact, with the introduction of irrigation infrastructure in 1970, agricultural production has continued to intensify year by year, reaching 8,700 cultivated hectares in 1988. Of these, 1,200 were sown with cereals (maize and sorghum) and 6,030 hectares with sugar cane (reaching records of 90 tons/ha). In the same season 1,387 hectares of tomatoes were cultivated.

The massive presence of day labourers (an estimated of 4,500 in the tomato and 3,000 in the sugar cane industry) is associated with the operation of the irrigation system. This phenomenon has had multiple effects on the social relationships and customs of the population living in the region. Most of the tomato farms, which still do not benefit from irrigation infrastructure, are located in the western part of the valley. For the American pioneers of tomato cultivation in the region, the first advantage that Autlán offered for development was the weather. In the case of Autlán (at 1,000 mt above sea-level) it is described as excellent, with warm conditions throughout the year and with fresh winds during the nights to favour plant growth. However, as Verhulst (1988: 4) has shown, 'for two or three years the cultivation of tomatoes has been harassed by virus diseases'. This has recently led to some companies abandoning the region. In a way, the romantic image of a privileged and healthy environment, now has to contend with the paradoxical realities of the effects of modern development in the valley: on the one hand, increasing competition for water between those who want to use it for human consumption and those who want to extend irrigation, and on the other, thousands of tons of rotting tomatoes abandoned because of market uncertainties while local consumers have to buy more expensive tomatoes transported from Guadalajara.

The core of the field research for this thesis was undertaken during a period of eighteen months between 1987 and 1988. My main focus was to follow the working and domestic situations of different social groups of tomato workers and to observe the social contexts in which they worked and lived. The study includes native workers, as well as migrants from other regions. Two of these groups were senior labourers who had been working for fifteen years in the tomato industry (their situations are analyzed in Chapters II, III, and V).

Two more concern groups of workers coming from small villages within the same region (see the situations described in Chapters II, III and VI), and the last two concern people who arrived recently in the valley from villages outside the region (see Chapter III).

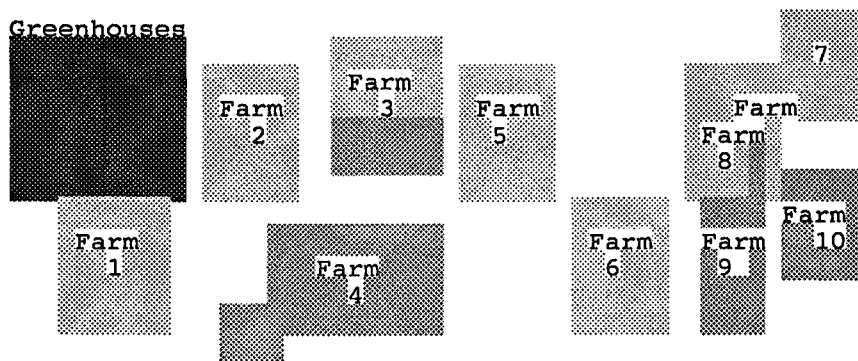
During fieldwork I interacted with workers in different situations without preconceived guidelines, and used different means to collect information. My most common procedure was to combine, within the same interactive sequences, methods of participant observation, situational analysis and discourse analysis¹⁸. Many extended interviews were conducted and life histories collected, and these were complemented by historical accounts (drawn from oral traditions and documentary sources) to provide a historical-political background. Similar procedures were used to investigate social conflicts and events which were important for understanding specific contexts. Thus, my thesis concentrates upon the analysis of the everyday situations and activities of workers of two tomato companies. These occur principally in arenas such as the company farms and greenhouses, but also include interrelations and events within the laboratories, administrative offices, machinery depots, packing and central storage plants (see Figure II for a schematic plan of these locations in one tomato company).

The contents of the thesis

The empirical foundations of this thesis are the ethnographic situations described in Chapters II, III, IV, V and VI. Contrary to the belief which sees ethnography as theoretically weak, I believe that the ethnographic situations presented in these chapters pervade my theoretical efforts to understand workers' everyday life situations throughout the whole thesis. One can interpret the thesis as structured by two thematics: 1) theoretical and methodological reflections (Chapters I, II, VII and VIII); and 2) the analysis of the politics of everyday tomato work (Chapters III, IV, V and VI).

The chapters are organized in pairs and are sequential in character. This chapters and Chapter II focus upon methodological issues and provide an initial consideration of the analytical implications of the methodology adopted. Chapters III and IV concentrate on the analysis of working situations paying attention to current globalizing and re-localizing trends. These chapters also analyze in more detail different aspects of working circumstances and the contexts of the tomato companies. Chapters V and VI revolve around power/knowledge differentials and workers' everyday strategies, viewing these as different practices of irony. Chapter VII explores the analysis of social

change, summarizing the theoretical results of the thesis and making a short overview of other worker studies and labour process theories. Chapter VIII - more than simply a concluding chapter - is an invitation to leave open the pages of the book and to rethink the human agency of my problematic tomato workers.



MOTORWAY GUADALAJARA-AUTLAN.

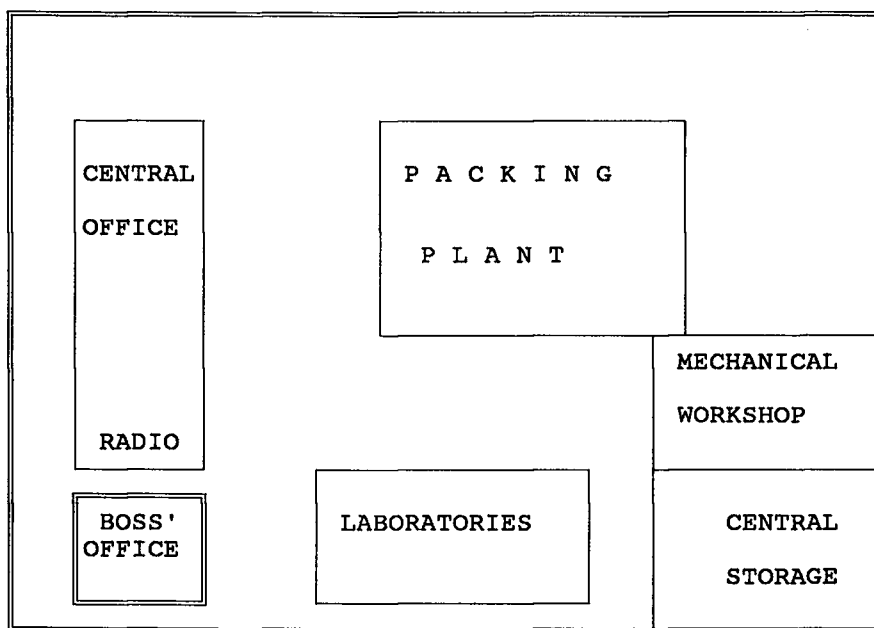


Figure II. Plan of a tomato packing plant and farms

Notes

1. I entitled this proposal *Vendemanos or Prestamanos*: a study of the life-worlds of agricultural workers. September, 1987.
2. This study on tomato workers was linked to a collaborative research programme initiated in late 1986, coordinated by Professor Norman Long and developed jointly by the Wageningen Agricultural University and the Colegio de Jalisco, Mexico. The programme, entitled "Contrasting Patterns of Irrigation Organization: Peasant Strategies and Planned Intervention", included various comparative studies on different topics focussing on households and local women's organizations, sugar cane growers, tomato companies, small farmers and government agents within the same irrigation district of Autlán-El Grullo, Jalisco. An interdisciplinary team of six Ph.D students (four Mexicans: Magda Villarreal, Elsa Guzmán, Humberto González and myself, and two Dutch: Dorien Brunt and Pieter van der Zaag) supported by Dr. Alberto Arce performed more than twenty months of fieldwork. The programme was financed by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) and the Ford Foundation. The research project focused on the understanding of the processes of change taking place in the region.
3. This is a reformulation of the problem of the interrelation of theory and practice which I touch upon in the next section. For a more comprehensive appraisal of this topic, see also Norman Long's Introduction to *Battlefields of Knowledge* (Long and Long 1992: 3-8).
4. For an exception, see Bulmer's (1975) collection which offers a critical assessment of Lockwood's earlier industrial work place studies and highlights the wider social contexts of workers' lives.
5. One can say that tomato work is a risky activity because workers can still die due to intoxication by pesticides. During fieldwork I three times confronted this situation.
6. A funny outcome of this discussion in the literature on workers is that romanticism (thinking of the possibilities of a revolutionary change or practical solutions to improve working conditions) and cynicism (positions supporting abstract and technical solutions or others which overemphasize different types of relativism) became the charity sisters who may actively conceal persistent inequalities.
7. At least for migrant workers, who have to sleep, play and work practically in the same place and conditions, the scheme conceived by Goffman of the working of total institutions is concomitant with the style of activities scheduled and imposed from above.
8. Apart from the sources mentioned directly in the text, I have in mind here others included in the bibliography such as, for the Mexican case, M. Roldan (1980) and S. Lara (forthcoming), and Lycklama (1980) who deal with migratory workers in the USA.

The other side of the coin is the book by Ghai, Kay and Peek (1988) about Cuban rural labourers. Using an economic approach, they present the Cuban state as the redeemer of rural workers and try with numbers to prove the paradise created for them. This study lacks a human focus, neglecting completely the real feelings of the 'happy' beneficiaries (see also the critical comment by Redclift 1990, No.2: 315).

9. Brown states consequently that any person who claims the right to alter societal processes on behalf of others is wrong when presupposing some talent or knowledge superior to that of the persons he presumes to help (Brown 1987:6).

10. Bourdieu (1977) defines practices as executions, stage parts and performances through which objects of knowledge are constructed. This means that in all practice knowledge is implicit.

11. The use of the concept and representations of irony goes back to the socratics. Kierkegaard reintroduced the concept in modern times, approaching it in a more imaginative manner and addressing critically the incongruencies of modern life and powers. Later, Orwell (1948), Hanna Arendt (1958), and more recently Baudrillard (1988) and Rorty (1989) have offered different uses and variations on irony to which I refer especially in Chapter Six. In sociology, Brown (1977 and 1989) suggested that the concept provided a programme or manifesto for characterizing the business of sociologists as essentially ironic. Woolgar (1983) has applied more specifically the concept of irony as a device for studying science from a perspective of sociological constructivism and epistemological relativism.

12. This is similar to the concept of 'joking relationships' in anthropology. However my use of 'irony' is different in that it takes behaviour to be constantly changeable. Thus, assuming that variegated practices are the subject for enquiry keeps us from imposing single interpretations or rigid formulations such as 'coping mechanisms' on concrete situations like mild mockery. The purpose is to extend and deepen the search for multiple meanings in everyday situations.

13. Giddens (1979: 148-149) presents this problem of workers 'living without alternatives' in terms of the lack of available radical solutions, meaning not the possibility of lateral mobility between occupations of a similar character (different tasks), but conceptions of how things could be otherwise.

14. Scott (1990: xi) interprets fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups, as expressed through rumour, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and popular theatre. These act as vehicles by which, among other things, the 'powerless' insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct.

15. For a more comprehensive assessment of this issue, see Long (1992: 24-8, 38) and Giddens (1979; 1990: 310-15).

16. This is the vision of the local poet quoted by Rubin (1987: 131-132). The following are some of the verses of the poem.

Ahuacapán para mangos,
ahuacates y parotas
Para pitahayas y nanches
Chiquihuitán y Las moras.

Para duraznos, ciruelas
y retintas zarzamoras,
en lo más alto del cerro;
allá por San Juan Cacoma.

(there are six more verses talking about other fruits and crops).

De platanares y mangos
todos los rumbos rebosan
tiñe el valle de verdes
mar de caña sabrosa.

Quien pida al cielo más
dones para llenar sus
alforjas, es un ingrato
evidente que no debe
abrir la boca.

Y aquél que aquí muera
de hambre no merece ni
la fosa, pues da tanta
fruta el monte que hasta
los puercos engorda.

17. It is no accident that the indigenous inhabitants of the region baptized the main town of the valley as Autlán, which is an *otomi* (a local dialect) word meaning the 'road of water'.

18. For an overview of what these qualitative methods entail, see Long 1989: 245-256.

CHAPTER II

PLUNGING INTO THE GARLIC: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

This chapter continues with the methodological reflections initiated in Chapter I by focusing upon the 'critical dialogue'¹⁾ between researchers and informants-as-social actors. It concentrates on the 'politics of fieldwork' where actions and contexts are intershaped by dynamic power relationships. The chapter explores how action and context interweave in the making of the sociological fabric or end product. The latter, I argue, is underpinned by the multiple discourses and practices of the participants, and afterwards, by those of the researchers themselves. The chapter aims to analyze how theoretical preoccupations inform the process of building ethnographies during fieldwork. Its purpose is also to transcend the dualism that often arises in literature on methodology when the 'ethnographic moment' is disconnected from the analysis of findings and theorization.

The chapter represents a 'deconstructed' version of my published article dealing with the encounters of researchers and agricultural workers (Torres 1992). In deconstructing this previous text, I move beyond the common metaphorical usage of the Mexican saying 'plunging into the garlic', to probe more deeply into the politics of doing fieldwork and undertaking sociological analysis. In this endeavour, I have benefitted greatly from the insightful arguments of my Wageningen colleagues (de Vries, and Seur, in Long and Long 1992) and other writers (Silverman et al. 1989; Polier and Roseberry 1989; and Randall Collins (1992).

The chapter is organized in four parts. The first offers a sociological exploration of the Mexican saying '*metiendose al ajo*' (plunging into the garlic). The second introduces a discussion on the politics of fieldwork. The third gives an account of the issue of 'methodological accessibility' and the fourth summarises ethnographically and analytically the political implications of doing sociological fieldwork and analysis. Finally, I offer some theoretical insights into the sociological significance of the research encounters I describe.

How sociologists take up particular challenges in research

The Mexican expression *metiendose al ajo* (or 'plunging into the garlic') is used to describe how 'one throws oneself in at the deep end' in order to acquire an understanding of complex human activities. This saying implies interaction over time, which is why it is often used to characterize dedication to sports or political affairs. The richness of the metaphorical usage is grounded in two factors: the difficulty of peeling garlic which demands the removal of the skin of the closely intertwined segments, and the lingering smell enclosed within the segments. We might in a similar fashion describe the challenge confronting sociologists when they become involved in the complexities of social situations and analysis.

The sociologist's passion for intellectual adventure entails the exploration of new ways of researching and interpreting. The metaphor conveys the flavour of the problematic nature of this venture, and encapsulates a kind of localized equivalent of Giddens' (1987: 18) notion of 'double hermeneutics',²⁾ that is, the process of mutual intershaping by which sociological analysis is constructed through social interaction. As Seur (1992: 116) suggests 'since we do not have direct access to the personal life-worlds of others, the meanings that individuals assign to the natural and social world around them can only be elicited from their actions, which include their verbal expressions. This is so whether the actor is an individual or a corporate entity'.³⁾

Thus, knowledge is a shared enterprise affected by people's interpretations of events and negotiated meanings which may not correspond to the programmed research process. The analytical challenges facing the sociologist are associated with the essence of words such as 'contradictory character', 'indeterminacy', 'changing situations' or 'ambiguity', whose nature cannot be predicted from the outset. They mostly arise from the more informal circumstances in which researchers are involved. A case in point is a discussion I had with a North American academic in the last phase of fieldwork for his PhD while I was making my first visits to the field to chat with tomato workers. His research also focused on the study of rural labourers. He communicated to me his impressions of the workers with whom he had interacted with some disappointment:

'I leave disappointed because of the impossibility of articulating a discourse of class formation in terms of the proletariat. The only thing that is clear for me is that even at a discursive level we cannot find a counter-hegemonic statement. In the end, what remains is pure realism, isolated expressions and hardly any organizational consolidation ... it was only in the last few days that I have managed to speak with some of those 'brave ones' from San Juan,

who even turned out to be relatives of a guerrilla fighter... With them I have been able to speak in a frank atmosphere and open up deep issues concerning politics. If it weren't for this, I would leave completely frustrated. The people of San Juan complain that those of Jalisco are feeble and apprehensive' (Field Notes/Nov.6 1987).

The understanding of the impossibility of articulating a 'counter-hegemonic discourse', 'the pure realism' and the 'issues concerning politics' expressed here, not only represent the personal feelings of the American, but are also a statement about his difficulties in grasping the subject matter, and thus a comment on the context of the tomato worker's everyday life. The disappointment of the researcher lies in the fact that he had only been able partly to satisfy his analytical preoccupations during fieldwork. However, looking at the context implied in this situation allows us to jump immediately into the complexities and ambiguities of fieldwork practices. This leads me to examine some of the biases underlying fieldwork and to place politics at the centre of the analysis of ethnographic narratives.

Politics of fieldwork

Doing fieldwork is neither neutral nor self-evident but in itself problematic and politically informed. So, what has to be spelled out from fieldwork processes - as Silverman and Gubrium (1989) suggest - is the political character of the field data and the political effects. This comprises the politics of, in, and deriving from fieldwork, and an examination of the construction of research networks and the consequences, throughout the sociological adventure, of relying on some contingent or permanent allies whilst experiencing confrontations with others. Therefore, talking about the 'politics of fieldwork' implies contradicting the idea that sociological texts are non-conflictive and mainly attempt to produce a 'new progressive discourse' and to bring solutions to the social problems presented. Moreover, as Latour has emphasized (1988), what has to be abandoned is 'the whole business of explanation'. The latter means impinging upon the reflexivity of the text defining new ways of understanding and avoiding the author contradicting her/himself by reducing the range of his audience to faithful and captive readers.⁴⁾

As we saw in the previous chapter, in developing ethnographic accounts researchers cannot evade ethnocentrism. Of course this places them in an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, it gives them certain privileges to create a convincing ethnography which eventually results in being more understandable to certain audiences. Yet, even if Foucault's assumption that power projects an

image 'all pervasive, unavoidable and inscribed in the very heart of all venture of knowledge' is generally valid, it remains necessary to explore the nature of the power relationships involved since the accounts produced by the researcher can represent different forms of complicity with different 'status quos' within ethnographic interactions.⁵⁾ This is not only a moral issue of being less or more ethnocentric, nor is it only an epistemological one which looks upon objective confirmations of past experiences; it is also a political one which reflects the moral and epistemological implications interwoven in questions concerning the authority⁶⁾ of the analyst and what is understood by the novel account produced.⁷⁾

Thus, in our analysis of the politics of fieldwork we imply a broad conceptualization of politics: that is, we do not intend to confine politics to the practices of the state nor to 'predefined big transformations', but to examine how power differentials operate within ordinary and extraordinary situations and how these differ according to specific circumstances and audiences. It requires an awareness that the methodological attitudes and procedures used by researchers are not neutral devices, and that a focus on the politics of fieldwork runs counter to the notion that social scientists can act as neutral observers of social interaction. In other words, what researchers and informants achieve in the interactive research process, wittingly or unwittingly disturbs the taken-for-granted nature of power relations and political understandings. Like Turner (1989), I do not believe that researchers can freely decide to detach themselves from the lifeworlds of others and develop a commentary that avoids prejudice about the underlying realities, or eliminate being hypercritical of those who intervene in local interaction. What we can do is attempt to reveal some of the implicit assumptions underlying sociological analysis. In this way, we can show how the use of 'prejudice' is implicit in the fabric of knowledge itself. This coincides with the idea of ironical conditions used in Woolgar's sense that 'things can never be known for sure', developed in the previous chapter.

Collins (1992) offers an example of how the working of ideological inclinations can push one towards specific analytical outcomes. He criticizes the 'micro sociologist', referring here in particular to Goffman and Garfinkel, for being engaged in a 'predefined conservative cognitive practice' which eventually produces a micro social order that 'is obdurate and extremely hard to overthrow'. He goes on to argue that in this way 'ethnomethodology shows actors have a preference for normalcy, and resist having to rearrange their practical actions in a way that disturbs the working consensus of everyday life' (1992: 85). Such a vision he questions. Hence, as we saw in the case of the American researcher, it is not only so-called conservative bias that produces teleological arguments since the same holds for 'predefined revolutionary

interest'. Such an approach is no less politically biased or problematic than the conservative one denounced by Collins. In fact, we only can see researcher's preoccupations as effects revealing specific assessments of power relationships which underly their analytical perspectives.

To summarize, we can say that to talk about the politics of fieldwork is to talk about the working of ideological bias and political precautions and its interrelations with common sense thoughts. Thus fieldwork is always politically biased and we will use particular prejudices as a methodological device for examining the political implications of the interactive processes. However, this does not mean that the same bias applies in every context or that certain prejudices correspond neatly to researcher or to researched. What is more to the point is how some of these ideological biases become interrelated and expressed in the production of ethnography itself. In the account that follows I use a vignette of my own interaction as researcher with tomato workers in the field to show how bias operates in specific contexts and to point to interesting problems for analysis.

Rogelio and his lecture on 'cacicazgo a la alta escuela'⁽⁸⁾

Rogelio is an overseer who works for a tomato company. As an overseer, Rogelio's job is to coordinate the tasks of a group of from twenty to fifty workers.

The local tomato pickers first came to my attention through Mely, who had been working for the company. I met Mely as the always-smiling girl who cleaned the research project house. She was completing her pre-university education and interacted readily with the researchers. Mely had been in charge of registering absenteeism for the company, every day for ten years, and thus had met many of the workers. She seemed to catch on easily to what I wanted to do in terms of research, and suggested that I meet Rogelio. His house was close and she considered his career as very interesting. What impressed me most was her comment: 'He gets the salary he wants from the company, because he knows everything to do with the law'.⁹⁾

Mely presented Rogelio to me during one of my first visits to the tomato fields. The head of the tomato farm - whom I also met through Mely - asked Rogelio and his brother to accompany me, which I interpreted as normal procedure with visitors. They asked me what I wanted to do and I explained my intention of writing a sociological book about the life of the agricultural labourers and that I was interested in discerning their points of view directly. From the first moment, Rogelio appeared keenly interested, but, before giving

any explanations, he tried to make sure he knew who he was talking to. He wanted to know in concrete terms how I planned to carry out the research, as if he had not been convinced that much by my first explanation. I referred to my intention to be present in the tomato fields, to my wish to observe the working day and how I would try to understand the specific ways in which they carried out their tasks and how they identified themselves as workers. He still appeared unsatisfied and commented:

'The issue is very clear and does not require so many twists and turns. There is no need to go pecking around so much. If you want to do it, it will surely turn out amusing for you, since you will encounter many different mentalities, but it is not necessary to take so many detours. Let's concentrate on one theme. Let's tackle, for example, the economic or political aspect.'

When I persisted with specific questions, Rogelio did not refuse to answer, and responded in his own personal style, with phrases that ranged from philosophical comments to making subtle jokes. I asked, for example, why he instructed the female tomato pickers to cut the fruit with both hands. He explained:

'We have to learn to train the body and know how to move it, because movement is life. If you carry your weight on only one side of your body, it will bend and hurt. Your body can only maintain equilibrium if you move it towards both sides. It is necessary to keep the body in shape because it is the only way to, as the saying goes, earn the bread with the sweat from your brow - [adding with a chuckle] and sometimes also from your second front [i.e. from your second house, namely your lover's].'¹⁰¹

I could see that he was testing me, as was the case when he said in a hushed voice:

'What has not been eradicated from here is *cacicazgo*, because here we experience it in its sophisticated form. The General¹¹⁾ inherited this tradition from several landowners and politicians, although economic resources had a lot to do with it. But now it is not only an individual, now they have become a gang that cannot be finished off so easily.'

He tried to edge me a bit more and posed the question:

'What do you think? What do we need in this region for peasants to produce better? Do we need capital, or is it opportunities and motivation that we lack?'

He pointed towards the bare hills and uncultivated land. I thought it over a bit before answering, and then commented that maybe the problem lay in what he had mentioned about *cacicazgo*. Rogelio appeared pleased with my response, and continued:

‘Exactly! The problem is that those hills could produce guavas or medicinal plants and those uncultivated lands could feed many more families, but as they are in the hands of those rich lazy people, this happens; they don’t produce, but neither do they let others produce.’

On another occasion, I asked if he had ever possessed land. He explained that it was the dream of his life, but that ‘things are hard’.¹² The land his father had acquired (7 hectares) was insufficient for the fifteen brothers and sisters. Several times, Rogelio proudly invited me to his ‘experimental plot’ as he called the half hectare his father had passed on to him. He had approximately 100 fruit trees planted, which he constantly grafted, implanting different varieties and carrying out various experiments.

From then on we became friends: we saw each other at least once a week during my eighteen months of fieldwork. He liked to comment on his everyday problems in the company and would wait for me to write it down. One day he commented enthusiastically that he liked the idea of being an actor in my sociological study and challenged me to reconstruct his life history in a systematic way. He also insisted on revising what I had written and would add things to the typed accounts when he considered it necessary. Rogelio would suggest workers for me to interview when he thought their careers were interesting and would provide his interpretations of the different situations we encountered. Once he confided that he had convinced other workers to open up to me without fear, as some were reluctant to answer my questions. They were afraid they might face problems later with their superiors if I gave away information I had written down. Rogelio remarked that he said to them: ‘Do not worry, just confess’ (*déjense confesar*), there is no problem.’ He explained that the reluctance of peasants was due to negative experiences in the past, when Catholic priests, after listening to confessions from the supporters of land reform, would point them out to the landowners or the bosses.

In turn, I invited Rogelio to offer a ‘lecture’ about *cacicazgo a la alta escuela* to the research team, where he elucidated his version of the ‘two-faced nature of the powerful’. During the presentation a Dutch researcher asked him what the General was like, and he answered:

‘He was something special. Deep inside, he distrusted everyone and was always fearful. For example, in the main house of Caguama Ranch, there

was a large rectangular table which he used to screen new workers. The General liked to visit this ranch, and when he arrived and noticed the presence of an unfamiliar worker he would immediately ask his military assistants and close relatives about the man. He would not settle for simple answers and would ask several times in a loud voice, "who is that bastard"? Still unsatisfied with the explanations, he would sit at one extreme of the table in front of the door, with his Colt 45 near his right hand and would make the worker sit at the other extreme. Only until he was convinced that there was no risk would he give his approval, afraid that his enemies would send an assassin.'

However, the General also appeared to have another side. He seemed to be considerate with his workers identifying himself with them. Rogelio continued:

'The General liked to recall that he was the son of a poor mother and thus knew what it was to be abused by the rich. He even suggested that we should not let ourselves be exploited, since the boss (referring to his own son, Osvaldo) was the son of rich people and did not know what it was like to suffer.'

Rogelio complemented his version by an account of the General's style of exercising power and the special role he assigned his workers when there were conflicts with *ejidatarios*¹³⁾ bordering his land:

'Those lands of Caguama Ranch were the best on the coast and much disputed. There were several *ejidos* claiming them. We were taken there as workers and advised to be ready in case of confrontations. We were seen in the region as the General's gunmen, but there were also soldiers working there. The soldiers built the road leading to the ranch. They paved it, using equipment belonging to several government institutions. There was even the rumour that Liz Taylor had given him a piece of land.'

Of course, this vignette contains arguments that might be seen as a direct response to the question of the 'pure realism of workers' raised by the American researcher. Furthermore, the picture of workers establishing a suitable distance in relation to the researcher, their explanations of how economic and political manoeuvres create differentials in terms of power and life conditions and above all their insightful description of the weaknesses of the powerful, suggest that the conclusion of the lack of a 'counter-hegemonic discourse' interpreted as implicit in workers' explanations is questionable. What is more interesting and useful, however, is to concentrate on the methodological implications of the use of different prejudices by researcher or researched for

coming to terms with the understandings of the political contextualisations implied in such situations. It is also interesting to reflect on the making of sociological knowledge and the analytical challenges that emerge within these complex everyday interactions.

The reasons for the presence of the sociologist in the tomato fields are not obvious for other interactants and hence not free of ambiguities. The researcher's specific definition of his role as 'writing a sociological book about agricultural labourers' is a theme which conveys and associates with different biases that either tolerate, undermine or acknowledge the sociologist's authority. The kinds of prejudice expressed range from curiosity about the researcher's intended plans, to an open reluctance based on political suspicion to his possible collaboration with company bosses (associated with past experience of betrayal by priests using the confessional box for information which is then passed on to landowners). Eventually the researcher obtains the workers' collaboration in the building of a picture of their views, but not as a direct effect of some systematic predetermined research strategy. This is achieved implicitly, through negotiated meanings and adaptations. The moment of convergence emerges when researcher and workers coincide with an explanation of the implications of *cacicazgo a la alta escuela* as well as when the research team accepts the worker and his intervention in their discussion meetings. In this sense, this is not only a tactical measure but a prerequisite for dialogue that expresses how a shared political approach develops and offers an interpretation of the context for understanding future situations.

There are certain key issues behind the idea of *cacicazgo a la alta escuela*, such as the underlying violence, restricted access to economic resources (above all land for cultivation), the exploitative practices and manipulation of people by a powerful General in order to counter the interests of his political enemies and the landless. Such issues epitomize the complexity of the political problems that existed and still exist in relation to land and labour issues, but they also help us to understand that workers' behaviour reflects their experience that radical positions are not too easy to maintain since there is no point in their acting suicidally or in a way that places their livelihoods in danger. We can conclude, then, that Rogelio's description of *cacicazgo* presents itself to the sociologist as a problem to be analyzed, but to the workers as a customary 'model' of power concentration. However, it is not a model applicable to all circumstances. It is better seen as a more concrete and peculiar description of the operation of a local centre of power, and, although the researcher adjusted his line to accord with the workers' discourse on *cacicazgo*, this did not mean that by doing so he was immediately able to grasp all the political issues involved in the working contexts that he was trying to analyze. That is to say,

the workers' explanation of *cacicazgo a la alta escuela* does not foil the 'academic prejudice' of the researcher which implicitly criticizes this concept as deterministic. In this sense, *cacicazgo* is a theoretical explanation caricatured a long time ago in the academic world to represent a 'local framework' which defines specific social practices developed within given political contexts. It is not accepted as a deductive theoretical path which offers a coherent diagnosis for all practices. Hence, the important aspect is not the use of *cacicazgo* as a framework but rather the concrete issues and analytical challenges enacted by people who deploy the concept in different interactive scenarios. Later, in Chapter IV, I develop in more depth what *cacicazgo* means within different tomato working contexts.

The American colleague noticed that Jalisco workers were more feeble and apprehensive than those of other regions who were more politicized. He regretted not encountering the latter in Autlán until the last moment of his fieldwork period, suggesting by this that he could not grasp their political insights. Again there is an implicit ideological prejudice underlying his political preoccupations. What is implied here is perhaps a positivistic belief which sees the authority of the researcher as elicited by the kind and quality of the data collected. This implies also that researcher's access to information is determinant for the analysis. This point connects up with the problem of methodological accessibility, which I address in the next section.

The question of methodological accessibility

As we will see in Chapters III and IV, the tomato activities under study in this thesis are organized following regulated but flexible forms of subcontracting (verbally or in writing) which, in fact, rest upon new forms of labour recruitment, particularly on so-called casual cheap labour mostly consisting of women and children (see also Collins 1992: 56-60). These patterns are associated with flexible industrial or marketing strategies. Such forms of labour are constructed with the traditional image of agricultural labour resulting from historical accounts which stress a centralized pattern of organization: For example, *hacendados* organized their haciendas and farming activities on a hierarchically-based power structure. The problem with this model, of course, is that it does not give close attention to the analysis of the changing dynamics in everyday working situations. Furthermore, ethnographic studies of centres of power are fraught with major problems of research access (Long 1992: 277), the issue of accessibility is not confined to what is happening in restricted corridors of power and spheres of decision making, as my own fieldwork

situation illustrates. In addition, the theoretical choices made by the researcher will also shape what is narrated in the sociological text.

The 'positivistic padlock'

Tom Brass (1989, 1990) has recently argued the existence of a barrier between the researcher and the researched in the form of 'methodological inaccessibility' that prevents the researcher from verifying directly 'unfree' conditions - here he is specifically referring to the *enganche* system (a form of debt-bondage whereby labourers redeemed their debts by working them off for contracted periods) - under which some labourers live. The coercive and repressive environment imposed by landowners or bosses restricts the observer from fully understanding the situation unless he can obtain direct access to the world of the 'bonded labourer.' The latter, however, is unlikely to be achieved satisfactorily if one limits the researcher's room for manoeuvre - as Brass appears to do - by confining her or him to a compartment closed by a 'positivistic padlock'. Brass points out that the researcher should be present at the moment of labour transaction or at least should know the terms of the written 'unfree contract' established by the employer. He also contends that the researcher should bear in mind the special nature of 'bonded' labour relations, otherwise the *modus operandi* of 'unfree labour' will remain hidden (Brass 1989: 54-5). But this does not go far enough, since by giving primacy to the unmasking of the 'hidden' mechanisms of exploitation, it fails to explore fully the everyday life-worlds and understandings of the labourers themselves. In this way, researchers are sometimes blinded by their own teleological arguments constructed far too removed from the actors involved.

We must emphasize, however, that methodological access does not imply the simplistic assumption that interacting with informants (in this case, agricultural labourers) automatically reveals their 'real-life' circumstances, making it possible for the researcher to identify with them (see Newby 1977: 122); nor does it in itself solve theoretical questions. A related point is that access must, as far as possible, be observed from both sides of the process, from the point of view of the researched as well as from that of the researcher. Indeed, the interactions between the different parties involved are infused with a dialogue which oscillates between compliance with and criticisms of various visions of the status quo and which therefore pervade the relationships involved.

Methodological access refers specifically to the boundaries of the interaction. The latter is not just a question of the researcher with her/his theoretical and methodological apparatus gaining access to the world of the

researched, through the application of explanatory constructs imported from the outside, such as, for example, gender, ethnic or class images; nor that of how local conceptions and practical strategies structure access. Neither is it enough to look at the institutional context, nor at the 'big moves' made that dominate or are resisted in intervention situations. It is also necessary to include the interpenetrations and interweavings developed in everyday situations on these different levels and within the same moments of encounter. Can we, for instance, pin-down the processes by which people internalize issues that they face while simultaneously externalizing them? Can we identify the interplay of communicative relations wherein people learn from and at the same time influence each other? These issues are pertinent not only for social encounters in general but are also valid for examining the process of sociological research.

In this light, it is possible to observe and analyze how people break down barriers when interacting in different circumstantial contexts and to identify the different positions they take within the narrow margins of the encounters in which they are involved. Limiting our analysis to structural locations (for example, those of the agricultural labourer, overseer, and researcher) belies the fact that each exhibit great variability and flexibility in their responses to the vicissitudes of everyday life, including that of dealing with the 'intervening' sociologist.

Theoretical focus and problems of methodological access in other studies about agricultural labourers

Before moving to document the ways in which researchers and informants-as-actors develop different strategies for breaking down barriers and constructing *modus operandi* for dealing with each other, I first wish to sketch some similar problematic situations faced by other social scientists who have studied agricultural labourers.

Let me start with Newby's (1977) well-known study of English agricultural workers. Newby's book is pervaded by an unresolved question. This concerns his contrasting interpretations of social constraints. On the one hand, he proposes a deterministic systemic approach which suggests that constraints are imposed uniformly on agricultural workers, and on the other, he provides empirical evidence of the different ways in which these labourers differentially experience and handle them. More specifically, he considers the political economy of British agriculture as imposing structural conditions that affect both the farm enterprise and farm workers alike (Newby 1977: 141). Yet, at the same time, he expresses his difficulty in making generalizations about farm

labour since he finds that the precise nature of the social positions of workers within labour hierarchies and production regimes varied from farm to farm and from locality to locality (op. cit. p. 371). Each constraint examined (e.g. rural labour market, pay and conditions, and tied cottages) presented many variations. Hence although the rural labour markets were 'nationally determined in certain aspects', they were markedly different according to the region, locality and type of worker involved (op. cit. p. 151).

Danzinger's (1988) account of British farm workers presents some similar theoretical problems when he attempts to match objective farm workers' interests (using as indicators wage levels, living conditions etc.) with contextual aspects. Hence, in the end, he finishes up restricting his analysis to the workings of the capitalist economy, without allowing for the ways in which workers themselves develop understandings and strategies vis-à-vis the constraints and openings they encounter in everyday social and economic life. Furthermore, his analysis of the lifeworlds of farm workers treats their work domain within the capitalist enterprise as separate from other relevant arenas such as the household and family, religion and recreational activities.

Turning to Mexican studies of agricultural workers, we find Astorga Lira - in search of a global interpretation of Mexican farm labour - expressing his disappointment with the contribution of the social sciences in capturing the reality of rural workers. He writes:

'Social science does not possess the means to capture in all their importance the situations that men find themselves in: the *peon* [labourer] who comes from a distant place to these lands [where he now works], the day labourers who descend from the *Sierra de Sonora* to the irrigated valleys in the middle of the desert. Social Science does not register in its categories the whole range of richness that these human beings experience in real life.' (1985: 27)

However, he then reduces the sociological task to positivist methods of enquiry, as illustrated by his own dependence on statistical data and analysis in the characterization and functioning of labour markets, the shifts in demand for workers of various types in rhythm with technological changes, the flow of foreign capital, the social production of agricultural labour, and the role of political and institutional factors. He fails completely to address the issue of the richness of human experience from the point of view of the agricultural workers themselves; nor does he explore the researchers' and other actors' dialogical relations with these same workers. It would appear that Astorga's caricature of rural workers as 'human commodities'.. 'condemned to a lack of consciousness' (1985: 117-122) is not the result of a dialogue with rural workers but more the consequence of interacting with managers of rural labour and working with the

blunt instruments of positivism.

Other Mexican studies conducted by Paré (1980) and Grammont (1986) in the central region of Mexico recognize the difficulties in elaborating typologies of labour because of the high degree of heterogeneity amongst agricultural workers. Having offered a number of interesting regional studies and comparisons, Paré remains doubtful as to the usefulness of these case data for generalizing on Mexican agricultural labourers. Like similar work, the studies of Paré and Grammont reinforce the need for understanding the subjective experiences and everyday practices of agricultural workers, as well as issues concerning how researchers can draw upon their interactional and dialogical experiences with them.

Let me conclude this section by advocating once more the need for methodological flexibility. This means recognizing the essentially 'local' character of the research process which frees us, initially anyway, from the duty of producing 'big inferences'. This viewpoint is congruent with Knorr-Cetina's call for 'methodological situationalism', which she describes as 'the principle which demands that descriptively adequate accounts of large scale social phenomena be grounded in statements about social behaviour in concrete situations' (1988: 22; see also Fielding 1988: 12). The foregoing discussion of methodological accessibility and the above brief review of studies, concurs with this plea for a more 'micro' and reflexive approach to ethnography which I broadly described in the previous chapter.

The dynamics of interactive situations

As I suggested above, doing fieldwork is doing everyday politics. This implies that the concrete political struggles between researcher and researched define what should be considered as important or determining for research in different contexts. It is thus distressing to see that the political relevance of sociological analysis is very often addressed quite mechanistically in literature on workers to the degree that it can be read with the following equation: the more we can penetrate the centre of power or plunge into the mechanisms of control of the labour process (which indeed means looking at the rationale of the decision making processes, i.e at the sources of power) the more we can expect analytical or political achievements and transformations. This view, as I hope this work amply demonstrates, is simplistic and naive.

Through the distrust and prejudice depicted in the ethnographic narrative, the 'multiple realities' which we are dealing with become shaped by researchers and workers alike. For myself and the American the disturbing 'appearance of

political backwardness' on the part of agricultural workers constituted an unsolved conundrum. In this vein, the politics of fieldwork are embodied in complex and variegated situations in which many irresolvable dilemmas abound. However, it is important to emphasize that speaking about complexity is not an argument designed to escape difficult questions. Dichotomies such as 'liberation or slavery', 'progress or backwardness', are unable to offer insights for deciphering the concrete working circumstances encountered; nor, likewise, are matters such as whether the researcher is prompted either by coercion or a free hand to take the opportunity to save people, or actively stop powerful manipulations, or of whether one is accused, by not intervening, of actively colluding with exploitative practices. What is important, is to offer descriptions of how workers manage these situations themselves. This is my aim in presenting the following two ethnographic vignettes¹⁴⁾, which show the different political agendas (open and discrete) underlying the interactive everyday situations between researcher and researched, and allow me to comment on some of the methodological issues and theoretical implications of the encounters analyzed from an actor oriented perspective.

Lessons for Luis - the teacher - from his students

The first vignette presents the interaction developed during a period of one week between Luis, a teacher in one of the rural communities of the region, and a squad of tomato workers, many of whom came from the village where he lives. Luis had worked in education for eight years in rural towns, and was well known in the state of Jalisco for his political activity. I had met Luis four years before in another part of Jalisco. He was very committed to peasant struggles and participated in a group trying to obtain land. I invited him to come and help us in the project.¹⁵⁾ He had expressed interest as he sympathized with the workers. He believed they were a potential force for change but, in his view, they were at the moment dormant. In any case, he did not rule out the possibility of encouraging some organization among them.

Luis and I agreed that he would follow the work day of a group of 33 labourers by becoming a paid labourer in their squad. The squad came from the village where Luis lived and worked. Some of the 9 to 14 year old labourers were his students or ex-students and others, parents of his students. We planned that he would later follow their careers in depth, also finding out more about their domestic life. At the end of each day, we would make detailed notes, delineating aspects to be explored further. Luis suggested this procedure as he assumed he would not have time to formulate written reports. He was confident

that he would have their trust, knowing that he had earned it and their respect by promoting activities for the school. He knew many of them personally through the primary school meetings he organized and through the kindergarten, where, as father of one of the students, he had been elected president of the Parents' Association. He was not afraid of physical work in the fields. He had often helped his father, who was a farmer from another region of Jalisco. He liked the idea of participating in agricultural work, not least because I had commented that this would be a useful way to understand the workers from 'the inside'.

During his first working day, Luis was conscious of the surprise everybody showed on seeing a teacher working in the tomato fields. They met at the truck that was to take them, and the foreman invited him to sit in front beside the driver. Luis had to manoeuvre a bit to be allowed to climb in the back with the 'mass of people': some were standing, others leaning on the rails, the chilly morning air stinging their faces.

One of Luis' students asked in a sarcastic but also curious tone: 'Are you really going to work, sir?' Others expressed confusion. They thought it was strange that their teacher should have to work like this. His answer was: 'Well, in order to eat, one must work.' This halted the questions, but Luis noticed that his presence had taken them by surprise and there were different attitudes expressed towards his presence: some prodded each other to behave well, nodding towards the teacher. A few tried to obtain 'lessons' from him about various subjects. For example, they were using very specialized Japanese pipes for irrigation, and one of the workers asked him to explain why the Japanese were so competent. Other people would come to him and disclose personal problems. The parent of one of his students who could not read or write told him about how he managed to work with figures as a construction worker, and how it was a great feat for him to be able to measure surfaces. He asked his support to continue learning in a more systematic way. The overseer assured Luis that he would not let him get into any of the heavy jobs, but Luis decided to 'play deaf' and ignore this protectionist attitude. His aim was to follow closely the details of the day, and he did not want to accept any privilege which might hinder him observing at first hand workers' behaviour.

The respectful atmosphere lasted only three days, however. Luis used the opportunity occasioned by some of their questions to link up with his own interests. Thus, when asked about the Japanese, he manoeuvred his way in the conversation to speak of the recent presidential elections in Mexico, reminding them that Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was the candidate of the poor (*de los jodidos*). They appeared uninterested, and when he pressed further he learned that they had not voted because they had not registered in advance as required.

Luis insisted on doing all jobs so as not to isolate himself from the group, and in this way he joined the planting activities. Two of his students showed him the procedure. After a while, Luis realized that each one followed his own techniques in a way that made the job easier for them. His pace was so slow he fell behind from the beginning, but when reaching the end of the furrow, one of his students who had already finished, came to his assistance. Other workers were murmuring, and Luis overheard a girl saying: 'Come on, Lydia, help your teacher, it might earn you a 10 in the finals for fifth grade'.

One day an ex-student, now following secondary school, commented that her sixth grade teacher had recommended them to vote for the PRI (the governing party) when they were old enough, arguing that it was for real democracy. Luis took the opportunity to explain that the party was composed of *charros* ('unelected' and corrupt leaders). Moreover, Luis pointed out that the propaganda on television was designed to convey a 'democratic image' of the PRI, but that it was not the way things were in reality. He became more aggressive, asking if they thought they had a good future ahead of them, and, without waiting for a response, explained that the PRI had been in power for 60 years, throwing the country into disgrace. A young boy asked who Luis's candidate was, and he repeated that Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was the candidate of the poor. The boy continued, 'But sir, the PRI always wins, how is this possible?' Luis could only answer this was due to massive fraud.

Luis received comments about the advantages of being a teacher in comparison with being a rural labourer, and noticed that now they were asking for fewer explanations and were instead providing these themselves. Many complaints arose concerning the behaviour of other teachers and the lack of services in the town. Luis was becoming disappointed by the apathy towards the lessons he intended to provide in politics. The last day of that week, another hard job was assigned to him, but this time he did not have to manoeuvre to get it, for the overseer directly asked him to do it. It involved the application of pesticides with a manual spraying pump. Luis liked the idea because this was a new challenge, and it would give him the opportunity to work beside a group of labourers with whom he had had little contact. They were a group of five young men between 17 and 19 years old, one an ex-student. One of them commented that he had not been able to finish secondary school for lack of money. Luis considered this a good moment for another political lesson and asked then how he perceived his future situation. The boy appeared uninterested and Luis, disenchanted, paused to observe the group. Their movements appeared repetitive and there seemed nothing interesting in their actions. Suddenly, Luis noticed they were actually writing on the ground with the pesticide: they would move the spraying tube in order to project the liquid a

long way off, far past the plants themselves. It was some sort of competition to see what they could write. Luis strained to read what they were writing: one was shaping the letters of the name of a girl he liked, another was drawing a heart and his girlfriend's initials. They commented with interest to each other about what they had been writing, and so Luis decided to have a try himself. He wrote: "vote for Cardenas". They read it slowly and started asking questions about who this man was. Luis gave a short explanation, after which one of them said: 'What a pity! If we had known this before, we would have taken time to get the electoral card, but as we did not have it, we could not vote.' After some conversation, Luis commented that he would not return next Monday to work in the fields, and one of the youngest boys mocked him saying, 'Don't screw it, sir, you're not going to back out now, are you?'

Lola and the Janus face of solidarity

The second vignette presents a series of interrupted sequences. Interaction, from the point of view of the researchers, was carried out in relay, the baton being passed on to different hands as one researcher exhausted his chance to get any further and could only pass on the experience and knowledge gained to the next one.

Rogelio, whom we have introduced earlier, pointed Lola out to me as 'one of the most skilled women he had met in the tomato fields'. This alone would have motivated me to meet her and to interact with her group, but Rogelio added that she was a very young unwed mother of two children. When I met her, I was even more curious, for hidden behind this thin, apparently undernourished woman, whose gaze seemed to be lost in the horizon, I thought that many life-worlds must be interwoven. I was able to speak to her for only twenty minutes during the working situation, in which she constantly cut herself off. I had told her of my interest in writing a sociological book about the lives of agricultural workers and since I had been told she was a very capable worker I was interested to learn about the details of her experience with the company. However, from the first moment I detected her confusion as to my intentions in talking to her: she appeared to find no sense in it, and would give sharp, short answers to my questions, obviously with the intention of getting it over with. At that moment a worker who was known to take advantage of the female labourers, whom he blackmailed sexually, interrupted the conversation, and commented insinuatingly to Lola: 'Hello, *camote* (which literally means sweet potato, but its double meaning is sexual partner or lover) you've got yourself one today!'

When he had left, I continued to try and get words out of her, but she still appeared to be wondering whether or not I was making passes at her, asking herself why I was interested in her life. She produced direct, simple answers. Then, showing slight curiosity, she asked me what I was going to do with what I had written down in the field. I interpreted this as a soft exit, since I had already explained.

I gathered that the only job Lola ever had and liked was working for the tomato companies. She was sixteen years old and had never lived anywhere other than this valley. Another woman from the village where she lived invited her to come and work in the company and her only friends were the people working in the squads. Her family had never possessed land and she had only studied to fifth grade, explaining that she dropped out of school because her teacher was too grouchy. She declared that she found no sense in marrying, and anyhow, it is no longer the custom to do so.

I was unable to establish communication with her again but I overheard many comments about her. Some boys described her as *una cabrona* (rascal), narrating the times when some of the bravest had lost face when she challenged them to play with her in the sugarcane fields. One day I observed her playing with a group of boys during a break, in a recreation park neighbouring the tomato ranch. On the side of a swimming pool, there was a game taking place involving a large barrel inside which one or two people could stand. The barrel could be turned by running in it, but could be turned much faster if pushed from the outside as well, making it difficult to maintain balance. Most of the boys fell when pushed hard, but Lola managed to keep going. Then Lola asked to ride alone in it, but demanded to be pushed as hard as possible. She asked them to go faster and faster, until the boys pushing cried out for help, and so three others took turns. A small crowd gathered around to watch. I observed her for about five minutes, during which she kept her back straight and kept calling for the boys to push harder. When I remember her, I cannot avoid the combined image of her power to create space for herself in her work and in her play, and yet her weakness in the eyes of others, who considered her to be someone of very low status.¹⁶⁾

Unfortunately, my need to pass the baton was necessitated by a gender boundary and by my somewhat stiff style of carrying out field research which prevented me from getting closer to Lola. At the beginning, I thought my wife might take over as she was doing research in the village where Lola lived. However, her efforts met difficulties as she was working with a group of beekeepers who were mostly wives and daughters of producers, while Lola was considered poor and marginal to that group. It became clear that Lola identified my wife with the beekeepers and was reluctant to open up to her. We looked

for another 'runner'.

It was Hilda who took over. She is a close friend, a medical doctor who had worked for many years in the working class neighborhoods of Guadalajara (the capital city of Jalisco) where she lived. Recently she had been coordinating a health education project geared to housewives and peasant families, quite near to the project area. We shared a common concern for renovating the discourse of political activism. Perhaps an anecdote will be useful to indicate her motivation for joining the project. Together we had attended a conference run by a graduate of social medicine from the *Universidad Metropolitana*. The exposition concerning social epidemiology and the process of health/sickness was sophisticated and well ordered. However, Hilda was very uneasy during the conference and would constantly make comments such as: 'How is it possible for these upper class ninnies to come and teach us what must be done with the *pueblo* (literally village but used generally for 'the people') when they do not even know anything about it!'. She considered herself as 'one of the people' and worked among them. I agreed with her in part, and answered that perhaps it was our own fault and that the place occupied by the speaker should be taken over by people like her, who had the knowledge and the capacity to present the reality in more depth.

Hilda would visit us often while living in the valley. She criticized us for having left 'social' practice and for being seduced by 'academic temptations', but was very interested in the methodology we were trying out, and was eager to test it for herself to see if it could lead her to a better understanding of the life-worlds of organized groups. This is how she became involved in the project, although she claims she was not looking for anything specific to begin with. She was curious to see what would come of it, and to her surprise, interesting things did emerge.

Hilda was determined to win Lola's friendship as part of the analysis of the life histories of three families of rural workers. At the beginning she managed to establish trust with her, accompanying her in her everyday activities, playing with her children, and helping out whenever she was allowed, while conversing in a relaxed way. This was done at Lola's house, as the work season had not yet started.

I present here only some parts - taken from Hilda's field notes - of the crucial moments of the relationship between Hilda and Lola, especially during the time they worked together planting tomatoes. Hilda said she was not only interested in an academic study but wanted to feel what the workers - like her friend Lola - felt and thus decided to join Lola as another labourer. She stressed her main motive was solidarity. From previous conversations with Lola, Hilda had formulated a basic question: why was it that the behaviour and habits I had

described of Lola in the tomato fields were so different from those she had seen in the 'marginality' and 'anonymity' of her life within the village?¹⁷

Hilda had to get up very early in the morning to meet the rest of the squad and wait for the truck that would take them to the fields. She encountered Lola, who poked her playfully from behind before jumping into the truck. 'You came', she said, in a soft but slightly incredulous tone. Hilda was a bit bewildered and describes how she lost her own identity step by step during that working day:

'I did not know what to do, lost within that world of people, where all the women were dressed alike, with their heads covered. I could not even recognize Lola and her friends. I had no idea where to go, but was shoved by the foreman into the truck. I had to obey for fear of losing the job, but I was sure it was a different vehicle to the one Lola had been assigned. Once on our way, I was overjoyed to find Lola in the front line of my truck. It was pure luck!'

Upon arriving they ate the breakfasts they had brought. Hilda comments how ridiculous she felt eating yoghurt and quail's eggs while the rest ate fried beans with warm tortillas. She wanted to share as they did, but the other women did not like her food. Once in the field, she threw herself enthusiastically into the job, but soon found that she was far behind the rest. She looked up to find Lola, and discovered she had finished her row and was chatting with another worker. Hilda realized with desperation that she had only planted a third of the furrow. She was supposed to place each plant carefully in the soil, making a hole with her finger, but felt useless, tired, aching and angry with her awkwardness. As she describes it, the day was a real drama:

'Sometimes there was no problem because the mud was soft, but it often happened that I thrust my finger into the soil like the tip of a spear, and painfully found it hitting against a damned stone. The mud had formed a glove over my hand that would find its way under my fingernails and in a short while it was pure Chinese torment. During those hard moments I would turn around to look at those surrounding me, and as much as I tried to copy their movements, I just could not manage. I resigned myself, and chose a posture that I felt suited me better: half kneeling, half sitting. That meant I would have to get up, walk and kneel again for each plant which was a great loss of time.'

'Each time an accursed stone would touch the small bone, where my nerves lie almost at the surface of my skin, I experienced a great pain, which cramped my body and made me want to cry. I was meditating on this when

I looked up and could not find my measuring stick (used to measure the distance between each plant). Furious and surprised, I asked my neighbour if she had seen it, and she told me a woman had taken it, pointing towards the end of the row. It was Lola. She had taken it and was now helping me plant. With her help I finished quickly and, during the moments I rested beside her, I felt superior to the rest who had not yet finished. I then realized we had not finished the furrow. There were about three meters to go, so I started working on them. But Lola stopped me, saying that if I finished they would make us help out the others. That meant doing the same for others as Lola had done for me, but I realized she had done it as a special favor. The foreman shouted at us and insisted we quit chatting and go and help the rest. I observed that there was a group of girls who applied themselves enthusiastically to the job as I had done, but, like myself, could not go faster. So it occurred to me to help one of them, and I did, realizing too late that I had betrayed an unwritten agreement with Lola. In the next furrow I paid dearly for this, since Lola did not help me out at all.'

Scrutinizing political agendas

Having related in detail some of the 'critical circumstances' in which the encounters between researcher and researched took place, I will now try to trace some details of the underlying political agendas that emerge from the above texts. The fact that the situation of the teacher doing fieldwork was seen by his students and neighbours as essentially unconvincing, that they questioned the teacher's trying to understand workers behaviour 'from the inside' or rejecting certain 'privileges' and getting involved in all types of tasks, highlight his contradictory role in following what was in fact a discreet, and not entirely his own, agenda geared to helping an 'absent researcher'. The workers evidently sensed the contradiction in this and their questions made this explicit. Eventually the personal and political motives of the teacher were reflected in his aggressive tactics when giving political lessons to his fellow workers whom he considered before as a potential but dormant force for change.

Workers' agendas appear more confused. Whether they fit well the image of political backwardness and disinterestness is a much more complicated matter. They may readily agree with Luis' or the researcher's interpretation that electoral practices are dominated by corrupt behaviour and fraud, but they exercise pragmatism in dealing with their everyday needs. They are used to talking with the 'winning politicians of the PRI', from whom they try to extract things such as public services and other concrete benefits in an effort to ameliorate their conditions of life. From this perspective they are not totally disinterested; indeed they manifest their own interests when trying to gain the

teacher's favour in order to advance their situation as students. For the same reason, they also become involved in the teachers' disputes over the quality of education and the use of resources in schools, all of which in fact are political matters. Above all they express themselves as disrespectful of the bosses' interests, when they misuse pesticides on the job, and when, as shown in the vignette, they will only go so far in helping their fellow workers, thus curtailing the bosses' efforts to reach higher targets.

In the second vignette, the combinations of discreet and open agendas are more intricate. The changing perceptions of the researchers were influenced by a variety of both absent and present issues, motivations and strategies. The interaction between researchers and researched were sometimes circumscribed by actual physical or gender boundaries, sometimes by the social constructs related to being workers, or by the interaction or even absence of interaction with neighbours. Social constructs about the researched ranged from that of a powerful female worker in the field to that of a powerless, almost invisible marginal - at least for the group of beekeepers - within her village. On the other hand, the researcher's purpose of 'writing a sociological book about agricultural workers', which was expressed as an open agenda, turned out to be largely meaningless in these encounters. Behind Hilda's engagement in the research project, lay the initial discussion between researchers about 'academic temptations', which it was supposed might impinge upon what she might learn from the character of the research process. Hilda's curiosity about the theoretical merits of an actor-oriented approach and methodology for understanding the lifeworlds of the people with whom she worked, underpinned her agenda based on her notion of having solidarity with workers (the sharing of common feelings and tasks) as a tactic for understanding the lifeworlds of workers. However, Lola rejected showing solidarity with workers during the working day, not because of any false consciousness, but, on the contrary, because her political awareness told her that applying this in an indiscriminate way would be detrimental to workers' interests. Luis's initiatives to 'organize workers' also reflected an interesting process of negotiation over meanings underlying his discreet agenda.

Emerging interactive 'political discourse'

The encounters depicted in this chapter highlight how the individual social researchers followed different strategies and combined various practical forms of intervention (sociological experimentation, political indoctrination, or solidarity with the workers) using different methodological procedures and

accommodations. These differences emerged despite the similarities of the interactive context: the researchers worked within the framework of the same research project, on the same general topic (agricultural labourers), in the same region, with the same type of labour unit and occasionally with the same workers. This underlines the difficulty, if not impossibility, of applying homogeneous strategies, units of analysis and categories in the practice of research. Each researcher evolves her or his own interactional initiatives in making relationships.¹⁸⁾ This runs counter to the picture often given of the sociologist, who is said to orchestrate social interaction in order to arrive at an enlightened analysis of the order of things.

The vignettes show how identities, values and interests are dynamically unchained and changed by research practice. The rural teacher, for example, by participating in the *cuadrilla*, almost loses the prestige he had formerly enjoyed. There are cultural variations or different codes of communication used in the interactions: distinctive forms of discourse, ways of dealing with situations, of testing each other, of presenting philosophical and technical explanations of work practices. Equivocal expressions refer to different meanings of the same adjective: 'hard', for example, may relate to a task, or to life as a whole. But above all, language variations express power differentials and different tactics for directing sociological research, as can be seen in the interaction that takes place between Rogelio and the researcher, or between the school teacher and his pupils.

It is interesting to look back at the tensions that arose between the researchers' good intentions (to do good research and to help the people) and the responses prompted when researchers tactically tried to alter the taken-for-granted differentials of power between them and the tomato workers. All three cases can be viewed as entailing 'a comedy of errors', or 'misinterpretation': the student workers' disregard of the teachers' political remarks which to them were part of a foreign logic and Rogelio's assertion that the issues were obvious and politically clear to workers and did not require so much beating about the bush. There were also moments in which shared understandings emerged: the mutual cooperation that in the end took place between the researcher and some of the labourers after Rogelio's invitation to talk with the research team; Luis's final identification and rapport with the student workers; and the unwritten rules learned by Hilda when interacting with the tomato labourers.

However, such processes should not be visualized only in dialogical terms. Sometimes the key to communication lay in practical behaviour (non-discursive means) as, for instance, when the researcher and student workers flouted the orders of the boss by playing with and squandering the pesticide spray. The incorporation of the researcher into their game in this way facilitated

communication at a level which went beyond the implicit power differentials that existed between them in other situations. Although the game involved writing and drawing slogans on the ground using the spray, the dialogical element was, as it were, externalized through a practical and material medium. Another example is how certain notions of worker solidarity were experienced by Hilda when she worked alongside Lola, the fast and skilled worker. Only when Lola refused to give Hilda any further help after she assisted others who lagged behind in the furrow, did Hilda realize that she had stepped over unwritten rules of solidarity. This - more than any other event or conversation - brought home to her an appreciation of the work rhythms, discipline and social hierarchy practised among work squads.

The different research paths trodden by the individual researchers nevertheless brings out a common thread, namely the importance of friendly and spontaneous relationships for gaining access to crucial networks and events. Accessibility is achieved less through technicalities and formally-planned means, such as the use of checklists for observation or pre-arranged interviews, though such means might still be considered indispensable, at least as a way for the researcher to identify her/himself. In coming to know the everyday and critical social situations of workers, each researcher moved through different locations - from camp to the fields, from work furrows to recreational locales. In the process, each (in his or her way) came to appreciate the perspectives of workers and to rely less and less on ideal-typical scenarios derived from sociological theory (e.g. that divide up the workers' social world into formal activity fields such as 'the labour process', 'household reproduction' or 'the strike situation').

Researchers' endeavours 'to plunge into the garlic' gradually acquire a political dimension and involvement in so far as the researcher and researched are able to understand and communicate to each other the complexities of power relationships and the myths of the political game. For example, they may become cognizant of the weaknesses of the powerful and the power of the weak, who are, whether by consent or coercion, at least part of the power relationship. Here my point of view stands apart from the distant scientific 'neutrality' of Schutz (1962: 54) or the 'methodological indifference' of Garfinkel and Sachs (1986: 166). Abstaining from making personal judgements or striving to show 'seriousness' will not, *per se*, ensure acceptance, nor will this necessarily lead to deeper insights. On the contrary, ascetic purity on the part of the researcher is to claim a position of authority which overestimates its ability to empathise with and explain the social context.

There is, then, what we might call a 'new' political discourse which results from the interaction of the researcher and researched. The resulting negotiated agreements on the meanings given to specific words and actions represent

numerous accommodations made by the parties concerned, and in this sense they convey the political significance of the discourse produced. Participants of the interaction confer meaning on the discourse dialectically by treating discourse as a circumstantial social product which belongs to the particular people involved. As Foucault contends,

Dialogants can hardly agree to be deprived of that discourse in which they wish to be able to say immediately and directly what they think, believe or imagine. They prefer to deny that discourse is a complex differentiated practice, governed by analyzable rules and transformations rather than be deprived of that tender, consoling certainty of being able to change, if not the world, if not the life, at least their 'meaning' simply with a fresh word that can come only from themselves, and remain forever close to the source (1977: 210).

The 'sociological relevance' of these research encounters

Several key questions arise from these encounters. What allows us to characterize such seemingly trivial encounters as sociological? Is it simply the rough consent achieved between researcher and researched to interact? Is it the shared or overlapping interpretations of a particular action, interest or process? Or is it because that, in the interactional process, concepts and abstractions develop which are in some sense distinctive of sociological research? Can we identify specific choices or procedures that constitute the essence of sociological analysis?

These are not isolated questions that can be dealt with separately. They are all intertwined. If one accepts that the content of the narratives of these encounters cannot be depicted as objective truth, and that researchers can only partially record the direct voices or signals of the people they interact with, then we have to ask more specifically about their significance: what do these encounters tell us about the heterogeneity of agricultural labourers, and the conditions in which they find themselves?

As the ethnographic vignettes illustrate, critical circumstances within the dialogues and encounters shape the course of the interactions, thus altering the demeanours of both researcher and researched. This dynamic process generates somewhat different perspectives on the lifeworlds of those involved, including here not only the researchers' differential visions of, in this case, tomato workers, but also the assessments of the latter concerning the nature of the research inquiry itself as carried out by the individual researchers.

The 'magical locus' of where and when sociological analysis emerges is not

associated with definitive answers to these methodological questions, but rather with the production of the analytical text. In this sense, the text is viewed as an exercise in which the author decontextualizes and transforms the experiences and strategic performances that form part of the research process. The notion of double hermeneutics should not necessarily imply a separation of 'the ethnographic moment' from 'the analysis of findings'. The vignettes emphasize that sociological research and analysis are part of one and the same process.

In this sense, the process of analytical reconstruction (indeed the reflexive relationships between researcher and researched) is not something cooked *a posteriori*; it begins in the notes made in the field, on sheets of paper, in small notebooks, in drafts that take up words, acts or symbols, and in recorded voices or filmed actions and not only at desks, in comfortable chairs, or in interaction with sophisticated computers. A sociological analysis is a complex web involving a process of permanent reflection that includes crucial moments of interlocking theories developed in 'critical circumstances'. Fieldwork, in fact, fuses and interweaves with other experiences, other accumulated concepts from diverse bodies of knowledge.

In concluding this chapter it is important to emphasize the need to abandon the idea of a 'single context' for political discourse on tomato workers. Such discourse expresses the heterogeneous ways in which they organize their lifeworlds. Moreover, this heterogeneity, I am sure, is the other side of the 'disappointment' and 'realism' expressed by the North American researcher working in the area. But to talk of heterogeneity does not mean that one has discovered a magical explanatory word that can simply substitute for the failure of the univocal categories of functionalism and of fixed typologies. Heterogeneity should be used to denote variations in self-organizing strategies that develop in concrete situations. As I have shown in this chapter, such heterogeneity is also a property of the relationships that evolve between researchers and researched.

This leads us to reassess what I consider to be the central analytical challenge explored in this thesis, namely the heterogeneous ways of combining escaping or avoidance behaviour, consent and resistance developed by tomato workers within different working circumstances.

Notes

1. Here I take into account the critical discussion by De Vries (1992: 78) who suggests that ethnography is not the isolated product of conversing subjects. This implies that in all forms of dialogue power differentials between the

conversants and competing academic discourses and interests are involved.

2. This entails a mutually-interpretative interplay of social scientist and those whose activities compose the subject matter. Hence '[t]he theories and findings of social sciences cannot be kept wholly separated from the universe of meanings and action which they are about... [L]ay actors are themselves social theorists, whose theories help to constitute the activities and institutions that are the object of study of specialized social observers' (Giddens 1984: XXXII and XXXIII; see also Giddens 1990: 314).

3. From this point of view, the concept of life-world has been described differently, e.g. life-worlds are revealed as fragmentary and momentary representations in social situations. Schutz & Luckmann (1973) write of 'the lived-in and taken-for-granted world' and Habermas (1986: 119) as a 'horizon within which communicative actions are always already moving'. Long revisits these concepts when he proposes the idea of conceiving life-worlds as 'actor rather than observer defined' (Long 1989: 247). In my view, Turner (1989) further clarifies the issue by presenting the life-world as a habitation shared by both researcher and researched during the process of social interaction. Stressing the concrete situation of 'feeling at home', he underlines the ability of people (researcher and researched) to transform their contingent conditions into something liveable.

4. Latour suggests that reflexivity (which can be achieved through texts open to a multiplicity of interpretations) is the means to contradict a naive belief in the authority of scientific texts. He emphasizes that writer and reader are political equals in respect to the explanandum: 'readers seem to be much more devious, much harder to take in, much cleverer in deconstruction ... than is assumed by writers'. Thus, he concludes 'we need to play down the exoticism of the other' (1988: 168).

5. From this perspective, we can say that the researchers' authority is relative and refers to particular audiences where specific jargon is understandable. De Vries (1992: 80) emphasises that it is the researcher who possesses the luxury of detaching himself or herself, reflecting upon experience and processing it conceptually. In this way we ourselves become involved in the shaping of bureaucratic and peasant realities, as experts, through the role that our 'scientific', and thus authoritative, representations play in future interventions'. Han Seur, following the Habermasian idea of the 'social-scientific interpreter', states this clearly when he says that the researcher 'may not even want to be detached from his or her own background or 'school of thought', should a particular analytical approach be considered useful, or certain themes and

concepts be considered important; or, when it is believed that some macro processes or unintended outcomes of action cannot sufficiently be described or explained by sole reference to 'local' conceptual frameworks. Finally, he or she may also wish, as I do, to locate findings in current theoretical and practical debates, using the jargon and ways of presentation that are characteristic of the academic world' (1992: 143).

6. I view the researcher's authority as arising from the production of a text. This relates to the common usage of the notion of authority (Barnes 1985: 185) indicating the distribution of knowledge in society that helps us to allocate and maintain credibility. We identify authority as given to those who may rightly expect belief from at least certain audiences. Anyway the authority of the researcher in the production of an ethnographic text is, as Polier and Roseberry put it, a 'discourse on the discourse' (1989: 252).

7. These remarks are expressed in the sense used by de Vries (1992) when he questions the grounds upon which we can justify our pretensions to say something about how others construct their world, or to represent others in relation to our own research practices. Hence ethnography should not be a devious method for reintroducing, by the back door, the authority of the academic.

8. The term *cacicazgo* is used to refer to a set of dominant relations with a local leader, landowner or local politician (*cacique*). It conveys the idea of a degree of economic or political power, with a strong implication of 'influence' and the capacity to manipulate other people's actions. '*A la alta escuela*' can be translated as 'in the style of an advanced (or sophisticated, refined) school'.

9. It is interesting to observe that Mely was the first worker with whom I could made contact. Afterwards I became aware that she held a key job, not wishing to imply by this that she was acknowledged either as proletarian or as a key informant. Being the first contact of my circumstantial research network, it was she who suggested that I contact those workers whom she considered combative from a class point of view.

10. In Spanish, front and brow - *frente* - are homonyms. This then is an example of his play on words.

11. Rogelio had worked in one of the many ranches belonging to the General, who had been Minister of Defense in 1968. There are many stories about the influence of the General in the region. Some accounts state that for at least 40 years - interrupted only by short periods when General was out of the political scenario - nobody in the main municipalities of the region became mayor

without his approval.

12. Later I gained more insight into the meaning Rogelio gave the phrase 'things are hard': this included his own perceptions of the unsuccessful ending of regional agrarian struggle. For Rogelio, not having land implied a frustration of his dreams. I also found out that his father had been one of the main instigators of the agrarian struggle in Autlán, and that he had always wanted to involve Rogelio and one other son. Coincidentally, their demands for land included 200 hectares of the extension currently being cultivated by the tomato company for which Rogelio worked. In 1940, a group of peasants had invaded those lands and had been expelled by the army. Several of those properties were also directly in the hands of the General's relatives.

13. Ejidatarios are mostly small producers controlling no more than about 10 hectares of land. They have the right to government allocated land as members of organized agrarian communities.

14. Horacia Fajardo and Miguel Delgado participated in the interactive situations with workers and offered me their field notes for constructing these accounts.

15. He worked as an assistant researcher.

16. Lola was the victim of a measles epidemic in the summer of 1990 and died for lack of medical attention.

17. In fact, aside from her low status as a worker, she lived in a small borrowed hut on the margins of the village. She also kept herself very much to herself and was looked down upon by groups other than the tomato workers. The first time the researchers sought her out in the village, people denied her existence. In these senses she appeared marginal, invisible and anonymous.

18. De Vries (1992: 55) describes this unfolding process inherent to the production of ethnography in terms of the building of a 'research network'. The relationships that make up this network are multiplex, not single-stranded or univocal. As a result, researchers develop multiple dependencies within this network.

Plate no. 1

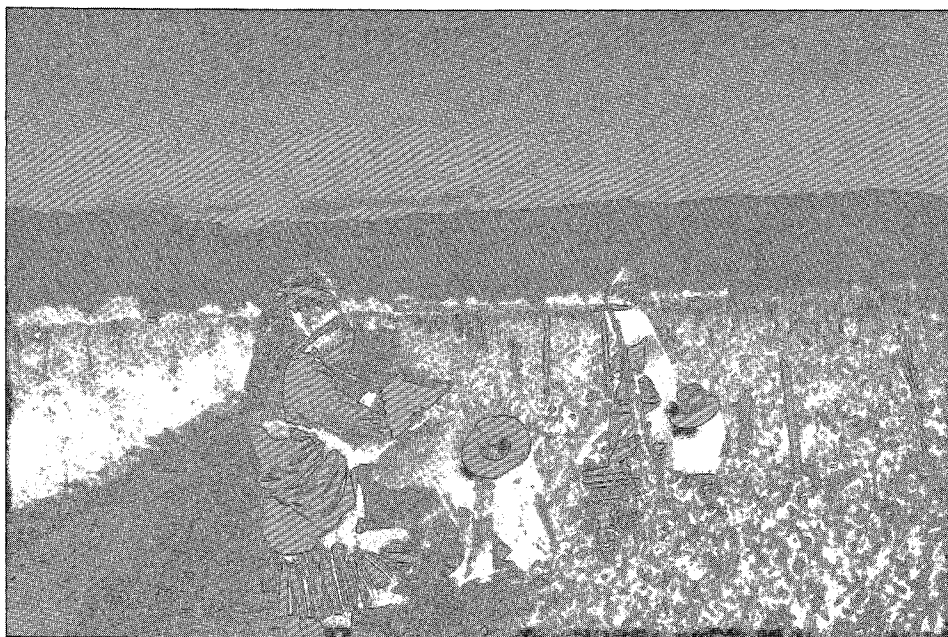


Plate no. 2

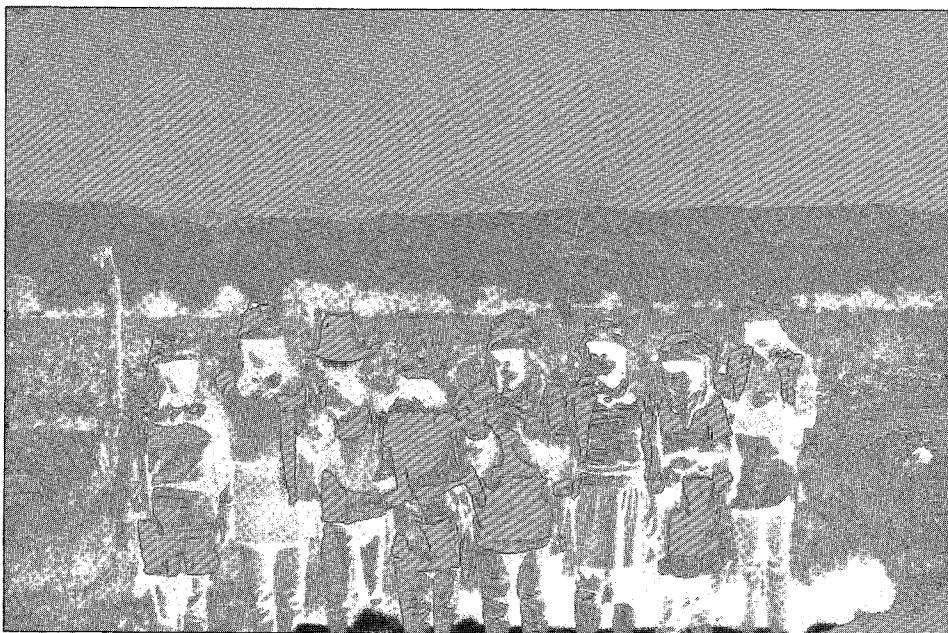


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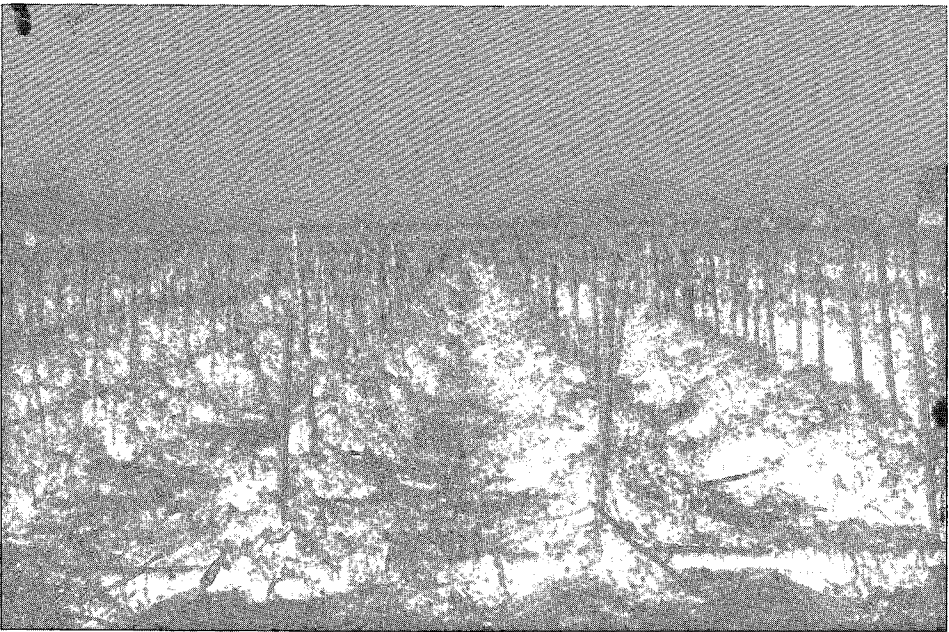
Plate no. 4



Plate no. 5



Plate no. 6



CHAPTER III

TOMATO WORK AND TOMATO WORKERS

Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce readers into the tomato fields and to familiarize them with the varied practices developed by tomato workers. As represented throughout this thesis, tomato work is not only an economic category but an epistemological construction associated with different cultural expressions. This means that labour (in this case work in the tomato industry), in line with Habermas's view, is "socially coordinated ... rooted in culture and bound-up with forms of symbolic interaction" (Pusey 1987: 28). Thus tomato work is here viewed as a concrete illustration of a multidimensional agricultural labour process.¹⁾ However, to display these actualities, implies excluding other possibilities. As Newby suggests (1977: 123), "locating a study of farm workers is fraught with difficulties". The object of such a study, therefore, is not to establish a typical or empirical scenario but mainly to grasp a set of theoretical problems. In this sense, my focus on the actual practices of workers - as also stressed by Jessop (1990) - is to search for an understanding of contingent and definitive characteristics that are not simply determined at a more abstract and simple level of analysis. Concrete situations have, as Marsden comments, 'emergent properties which extend beyond the immediate context giving structural regularities an indeterminate quality' (1990: 31).²⁾

Contemporary analyses of agricultural labour processes and rural labour are focused upon issues of globalisation and relocalization (cf. Marsden et al. 1992; van der Ploeg 1992). To reveal the relevance of current globalizing trends, van der Ploeg proposes that we acknowledge that

"the actual (although far from complete) submission of agriculture to agribusiness, and to capital in a general sense, would be unthinkable if not accompanied or preceded by a contemporary (or prior) disconnection of farming activities from the local sets of social relations of production. These regulate the mobilisation, allocation and reproduction of land, labour, capital and required non-factor inputs" (1992: 23).

Thus, from a global perspective driven by technological developments, the locality (our concrete setting) and the sets of local relations entailed may disappear and may be replaced by a completely new set of artificially-created growth factors, general trends and standard procedures (van der Ploeg 1992). The traces left by these overwhelming trends of technological progress conceal overlapping images of what appear to be ideologically condemned archaic characteristics of rural labour processes. In other words, despite the diverse nature and innovations of agroindustry and the flexible contracting and subcontracting forms adopted by enterprises, the mobility of all inputs and factors of production (especially in biotechnology) and the novel and wide extended use of telecommunications and computerised systems, there persists everywhere a mixed process of advances and 'surviving' social stigmas, and varied forms of exploitation and rural deprivation. Rural areas continue to be seen as labour reserves where low levels of unionisation and the use of skilled and unskilled local workers go hand-in-hand with sophisticated and costly exogenous expertise - a picture which can be summarized as the persistent and increasing vulnerability of rural areas affected by rapid processes of change (Marsden et al 1992: 3).

An almost paradoxical process of relocalization is emerging in which locality appears as quasi disintegrated as a result of the presentation of several forms of disconnection provoked by new forms of technological development,³ but where eventually people come into the picture to reassert the significance of locality within this discourse on global trends affecting the agricultural labour process. Such a view admits that the conditions of existence and reproduction of workers, which are locally and regionally embedded, perform an active role in reorganizing national and international forces of change, sometimes in spite of and sometimes because of more internationalized global interconnections and processes. In this sense, relocalization means in van der Ploeg's terms that the '*art de la localité*' can be constructed here and now even where internationalization and processes of social homogenization converge and dominate. Thus, locality again becomes relevant if not immediately strategic to understanding agricultural labour processes. The issue to examine in the concrete is the nature of working practices and how they contribute to bringing about forms of local identity, and to reinforcing elements of social change or continuity. In doing so I follow Long's actor-oriented approach in order to go beyond the concept of external determination and to analyze 'how workers accommodate themselves to others' interests and 'designs for living'" (Long 1989: 222).

In analysing working scenarios, I follow the approach suggested by Agnew and Duncan (1989) which is aimed at bringing together sociological and

geographical images. This means looking at work settings in the micro locales (mostly the tomato rows and greenhouses) where everyday routines of social interaction take place, in particular at the distinctive features that identify the workers with their different places, and at the same time at the macro locations where social and economic activities take place at department, farm and company levels. Thus, work scenarios are important sources for the analysis of social and political orders within tomato work. This focus differs quite markedly from approaches centred on labour economics and labour market systems which start from pre-existing categories and overlook the dynamics of everyday working situations.⁴⁾

Issues which are persistently and complexly intertwined in everyday working situations, such as the different ways of solving problems and conflicts, changes in the roles and ways of implementing tasks, the shifting definition of levels within hierarchies, the style of communication used by bosses, administrative officers and workers in different work places, or the process of translating and negotiating technical and disciplinary instructions according to different circumstances, can only be understood by understanding their dynamic character and interrelations. This leads to an analysis of how work places are symbolically created by people acting at different levels, who are constantly re-shaping and re-structuring space to make room for manoeuvre (Long 1984). This implies, for instance, that it is not enough to focus on a teleological argument in search of solutions to specific problems and conflicts. Joking, avoidance or disruptive behaviour must also be appraised. I will also look at how the organization of everyday and periodic activities obey or ignore certain priorities or correspond to current definitions of the most urgent needs underlying different rhythms of the working day.

I consider these variations as reflected in the heterogeneity of workers and company staff (see Long 1988: 118; van der Ploeg 1990: 26). Focusing upon the notion of heterogeneity highlights the process of mutual intershaping of the changing identities of people coming from different local rural communities and town neighbourhoods and other Mexican provinces. This notion also includes differences that result from age, gender, ethnicity, skills, positions at work, and the type and commitment of job (permanent or temporary). A crucial matter is to see how the multiple cultural repertoires available to workers and embodied in their different lifeworlds shape the performance of tasks and the enactment of different roles. In fact, the defining of organizing schemes and shifting time-space positions are shaped by a variety of worker initiatives, interests and interpretations. In this way one can see the significance associated with spaces where workers experience certain events or where they find ease or try to avoid difficulties.⁵⁾

This chapter is based upon two sources: on workers' explanations which I use to present the ways workers portray themselves as individuals and groups cast in different roles, and to build up a picture of the contexts in which workers engage in different tasks and develop skills; and on my own observations of working moments within various contexts. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first shows different ways of representing working situations. The second explores the wider spectrum of worker heterogeneity showing its relation to the mechanisms of the labour market, and the third conceptualises the dynamics of working situations.

The complexities of everyday working circumstances

From my first day accompanying workers in their everyday affairs, I gained the impression that everything moved at speed. Everyone on the tomato farm appeared to be engaged in different routines, constantly talking and commenting to each other, interpreting orders and taking initiatives. In such a predicament I asked myself how I was to follow the crucial issues and interesting situations occurring at any one time on the same day in five to ten different squads, consisting of anything up to 200 workers during different phases of the tomato season. It was not only a matter of remembering the thousands of words, profiles, details, opinions and observations that needed to be recorded, but of making sense of new situations that constantly emerged and to relate these to other events that I had already registered as interesting for analysis. The question reflected my preoccupation with following a particular research strategy while at the same time being involved in a research network which included different squads of workers and other individuals. In both cases, I was constantly losing control as I switched between different groups of workers and their positions within the ongoing task and between different tasks.

Yet, I cannot say, in retrospect, that my recorded notes from this sociological adventure in the tomato fields are any the less systematic for analysing the overall labour process or any the less enlightening for understanding the crucial aspects of exploitative moments for their being mainly a reproduction of a persistent dialogue with workers and others in their different everyday contexts. This does not, in principle, represent a theoretical weakness. On the contrary, I would argue that concentration on specific settings and the continuous theoretical efforts to reflect on these settings is advantageous for understanding what I conceptualize throughout this thesis as 'everyday working practices'. I therefore aim in this section to show how such continuous theoretical effort can be placed in the presentation of ethnographic accounts

derived from the interactive research process during working days that correspond to different phases of the tomato season. The aim is not only to present the complexities involved and to show how one can depict aspects of such complexity, but to demonstrate how one can interrelate practices and language expressions of different scenarios.

A visit to a tomato field on an ordinary Friday

I started to interact with tomato workers on the farm called La Lima, which belonged to the Rose Company, one morning in November 1987, when most of the workers were engaged in cutting tomatoes. I could see a group of workers busy between the rows of plants where I was walking with Rogelio, the *cabo* (overseer), and Alejandro, in charge of irrigation. They were accompanying me in compliance with instructions from Chano, the farm head and also Alejandro's brother. Chano looked very happy that day, repeatedly using his walkie talkie - the symbol of authority on the farm - to communicate with the boss and other departments of the company. He was also involved in a hectic programme of activities going from one end of the eighteen hectares of tomatoes to the other, in his pick-up, only stopping to do specific tasks or give instructions. Alejandro and Rogelio were answering questions and interrogating me about my motives for visiting the company. In the meantime they also kept an eye on the operations taking place. Rogelio explained that his workers already knew exactly what to do and he trusted them to do it efficiently. He commented that it was often the bosses who gave absurd orders and that "the workers have a lot of initiative and think well" but feel constrained by the bosses' intentions and plans. He mentioned more specifically that it was often those in the office doing the daily planning and in closer contact with the boss who restricted the workers' creativity and did not take their experience into account.⁶

One of the first questions I put to them concerned the complaints heard from some teenage female workers about getting muddy due to excessive water in the rows. According to Rogelio this was an effect of one of the absurd instructions received. It was only necessary to maintain humidity, not to swamp the whole plot, which was a hindrance to better and more comfortable working conditions. But the bosses ordered it and the workers had to comply. Alejandro gave me other cases of absurd instructions while Rogelio went to look after his workers. He followed the activities of several tomato furrows and twice stopped to give a demonstration on how to cut tomatoes or to choose ripe ones. Later he explained that these young workers were reluctant to obey his instructions

on selection and he had therefore been showing them how to distinguish the fading of the green at the top of the tomato. When one of the female workers responded that those tomatoes were still not ripe, Rogelio corroborated his dictum by cutting a tomato in half with a strong movement of his hands. He convincingly showed her the colour of the seeds which were yellow, and then he informed me that that was the best moment for the tomato to be harvested.

The workers were following a clear trajectory - to complete the rows considered as the first task-block of the day. They worked side by side along the rows. An uncertain situation emerged at the beginning of the second task-block. In spite of the fact that at least two of the rows included thousands of fallen plants, nobody wanted to start in the first and following furrows because they were water-logged. Normally, workers prefer to work on rows with fallen plants because the *cabo* and head of farm did not exert pressure on them to cut all the ripe fruit that such plants produce, only those that are visible. On such rows the workers can advance more quickly. The workers used different tactics to avoid working in these first rows. Some slipped off to a nearby cane field feigning urgent need, others simply tried to hide from the *cabo's* eyes, others played or ran around. The shortage of drinking water was used as a pretext for spending more time waiting for the water carrier who was usually late. In the end, the *cabo* had to order the more loyal of his workers to resume cutting.

Alejandro announced that he had to irrigate a more distant area on the farm and went off with two assistants. The workers closest to me and with whom I tried to keep up a dialogue between the rows, were now a group of ten female workers. They were joking, singing and sometimes playing about among themselves. To some extent this was a way of attracting mine and the *cabo's* attention. One of them knocked a close female worker to the ground and to make it more noticeable shouted, "!hey! look at Clara, she has fallen down". Another was doing nothing and complaining about the puddles in the rows in which she was working. One of the youngest was challenging Rogelio to try to see what she was doing, taking advantage of the higher plants that totally covered her body. "Maybe I've been playing cards here for more than ten minutes and you haven't noticed it", she called to Rogelio. "You are my accomplice, come in and see what I'm doing". She was trying to play a joke on Rogelio, but he refused to get involved because other workers had warned him of this girl's tricks.

After two hours, the farm head approached me for the first time to ask how things were going. He explained that he was very busy at that moment and perhaps at lunch time he would be able to see me. He had come to offload plastic boxes nearby the rows and to carry away the full boxes. This was an improvised task, replacing the work of one of the pick-ups that had just broken

down. On another occasion he came to supervise the workers and the voice of the boss's executive secretary could be heard over the walkie-talkie giving him particular instructions. Apparently the boss was interested in increasing the quantity of tomatoes cut and was stressing that all tomatoes in a condition to be sold had to be cut. She emphasized that this included all tomatoes from the fallen plants. She also asked for estimates of the number of boxes likely to be cut that day.

After the second task-block, a pick-up arrived with the woman in charge of time-checking (the *checadora de tiempo*) for all the farms. Some workers, who were nearby, immediately surrounded her pick-up and gave her their identification cards that they had received before starting work that day. She collected the cards from all the workers of this particular farm, stopping in three different places. The task of *checadora de tiempo* is important for workers, who describe her as *la que nos pasa el día* (she who registers our working day) (see plate 1).⁷ In principle nobody fails to present her their card, knowing that to do so would mean the company would not recognize the day as a working day. However, as I found out later, the task of the *checadora de tiempo* is sometimes difficult and conflictive, especially in the case of workers who are sick or where she is expected to become the accomplice of workers favoured by the head of personnel, farm head or *cabo*. Some workers were penalized by the boss, farm head or *cabo* by a note on their card saying that the day was not to be counted as a working day. The *checadora* is usually the first in line for dealing with the protests of these workers. On this day, she confirmed to the farm head that his estimate of 84 workers was correct.

To assemble a common perspective of one day in tomato work on one farm of the Rose Company, some additional information must be included which I did not yet have. From the secretary who controls the data on workers I learned that on my visit, harvesting was in its tenth day. This meant that it was close to the peak of production. Three squads of workers had been taking part. Two, consisting of 59 and 35 young female workers, led by Rogelio and another local *cabo* were dedicated solely to cutting tomatoes. The other squad including eighteen, mainly young male workers from outside the region and led by their own *cabo* was dedicated to tasks such as lifting plants, refixing the strings for tying up the plants and applying fertilizer. Another six workers were obeying official instructions from the farm head, two taking care of irrigation, a watchman, a water carrier, and two assistants.

The tomato season

Considering the complexity and the number of surprises that crop up in a working day, an analysis of the accumulated complexities of one tomato season turned out to be more difficult than anticipated and the opportunity to get accurate information was limited. For researchers, access to and talks with good informants are crucial in solving such problems. But good informants are scarce and the researcher is lucky to find them. To express oneself clearly and be able to concentrate on relevant information is said to be the mark of a good informant. Being engaged in the different activities for many years can also make someone into a good informant. Having the opportunity to interact with such people (the most experienced workers, the more informed administrative personnel and bosses) ought, in principle, to give the researcher reliable information.

But although I collected many descriptions and definitions of the sequence of activities in the tomato season, and listened to the main problems of some whom I considered to be experienced workers, I prefer to use here the story told by a young worker who had been made *cabo* only the year before my fieldwork began, and my own observations. At the beginning, this young man was afraid of my presence in the field, thinking that I was perhaps following a hidden agenda for the company. After speaking with others (foremen and farm head) he became interested in talking to me. He had been involved in tomato work for three years and he commented he had obtained the position of *cabo* without having had very good relationships with the owner of the company. This had surprised him. He explained in detail as we walked among the tomato rows how things were organized in a tomato season.⁸⁾ To some extent his narrative reveals not only his own skills as a tomato worker and his acute understanding of tomato production but, more importantly, it highlights the discursive presentation of the practices passed on to him, through the help of comrades, foremen and farm heads, in the learning process that all workers ordinarily undergo. In this sense, his narrative clearly depicts some of the common explanations given by the workers which, I argue, highlights the way in which they implement activities in what to them is the obvious or self-evident way of doing so.

I met this young *cabo*, Polo, working in the field with his squad of 20 male workers who come daily from his village *La Parota* (one of the more distant in the region, approximately 100km⁹⁾ from Autlán). On the day I met him, he was instructing his squad on how to tie tomato plants to the sticks. He informed me that in the Rose Company the season ranged from 120 to 150 days starting in early summer. The boss had explained to him that the season depended on

various factors, such as the market in the USA, the weather, and plant diseases. He continued his description of the season and the definition of tasks and subtasks by quoting two criteria used by the Rose Company for organizing tomato work:

"All the tasks follow each other very quickly and there is little time in which to perform the tasks. If one fails to do tasks at the right time, the next task will be affected.¹⁰⁾ Another important point is that the main organizing form used by the company is the collective squad, composed ideally of 35 workers which is considered the maximum that any one *cabo* can control".

Preliminary tasks

As we were engrossed in an ordered and long conversation in the tomato rows, I reflected that he might get into trouble for stopping and not supervising his group of workers. He replied with a statement similar to that given by Rogelio and Alejandro that "they know very well what to do and it is useless to exert pressure on them". He proceeded to describe what the preliminary tasks were, not all of which were performed on the farm. Some were the duty of the people in charge of the greenhouses, the machinery department and the laboratory dealing with soil analysis. I learned that the workers in the greenhouses take care of the germination of seeds and later for advancing plant growth. The greenhouses are located in an isolated place at a remote edge of one of the farms. They are well equipped, with special pumps, ventilators, water supplies and storage (see figure III). Tomato plants are kept in the greenhouses for a maximum of 25 days before they are planted out in the fields.¹¹⁾ Meanwhile in the fields a specialized squad of tractor drivers and three farmhands clean and plough the land, which, depending on the size of the farm, can last from one to three days.

Planting

According to Polo, the hectic time in the field starts in the second phase of the tomato season, i.e. when the seedlings are planted out - the 'planting period' in the language of the Rose Company. This can last for ten days depending on the weather, the size of the plot cultivated, the availability of workers and the humidity of the soil. It is crucial that the greenhouse plants are of good quality. The procedure for planting out was as follows: the plants extracted from the greenhouse sowing trays (made of dry ice) were carried onto the field in open

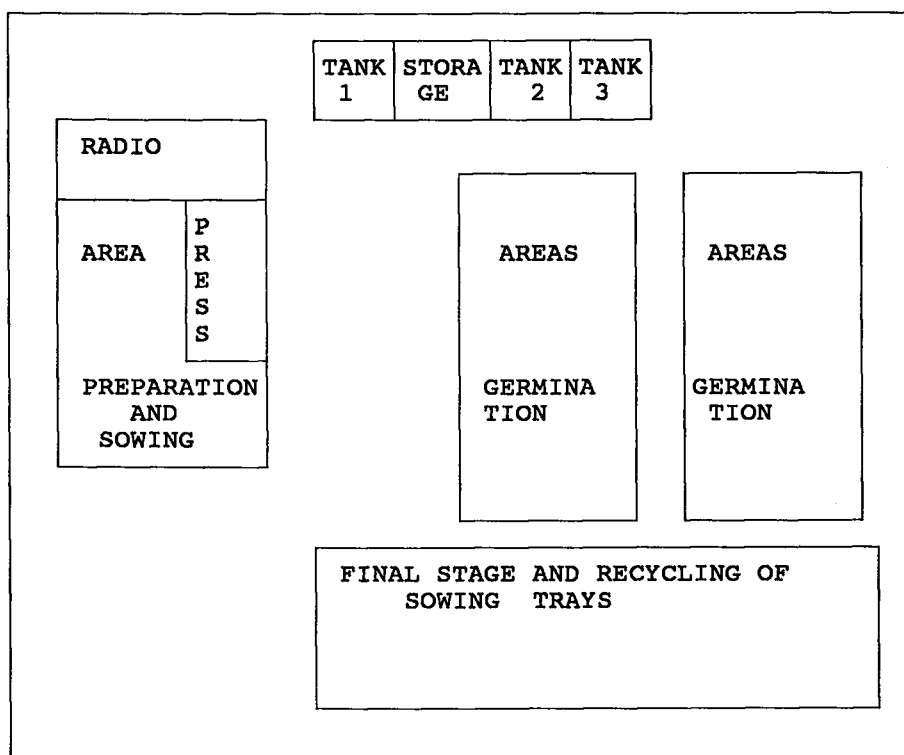


Figure III. Working spaces within the greenhouse

boxes of solid plastic; these plants were distributed to different parts of the land to be planted. The tractor drivers design and furrow the rows.¹²⁾

Polo explained that the planting depends very much on the quality of the previously implemented irrigation. If the humidity of the land is low or, in contrast, if there is a swamp, the tasks to be done by the tomato planters are more problematic and the risk of losing plants increases.

Planting is carried out in such a way as to preserve an adequate degree of humidity. Sometimes changes in the sequence of planting can be observed because of conditions in areas where the humidity decreases rapidly. The number of people planting and their positioning depend on the length of the rows and the irregularities of the tomato field. Women are better at planting than men. The task has to be done accurately and is highly dependent on the ability of the worker to quickly use their hands and in particular their fingers to make the 10 to 15 centimetre hole in which to place the plants. It is

acknowledged that female workers are more skilled because they have better control of their hands. The only tool that workers use for planting is a small stick to measure the distance between the plants. Some workers use the stick also to make the hole but this can entail a slower pace. The more skilled workers use only their fingers to make the holes. A normal positioning procedure is as follows: eight female planters take up position, one to each row of a specific bed into which the farm is divided.¹³ Four male workers take up an intermediate position between two rows to hand out plants to the female workers in the adjacent rows. In this phase squads of workers are simply called 'planters'. They receive instructions from the foreman or woman in command of the squad. The main instruction is to make sure that the hole is large enough to totally cover the roots of the plant.

Cultivation tasks

After planting, the sequence continues with fumigations, hoeing, pruning plants and more irrigation. Fumigations are carried out by special squads (tractor drivers with assistants) who do these jobs on all the farms under the direction of an agronomist and those in charge of the laboratory. I observed that some *peones* (ordinary workers) working in the squads take responsibility for reporting the presence and spread of diseases and viruses. In specific cases they also collected sick plants for analysis in the laboratory. In exceptional cases, if the problem remains, fumigation applications were extended over a period of as many as five days and the *peones* were involved in these applications using manual pumps. Fumigations are carried out if it is necessary throughout the whole period of cultivation.¹⁴ The usual number of fumigations when no further problems arise is two and the type of herbicide is chosen following economic criteria, not for their environmentally friendly qualities, a fact acknowledged openly by the staff of the company. The first application might be manzate or malatheon, and the following day the more 'powerful' and costly ingredient (in this case paratheon-metilico).

Cultivation practices changed drastically on farms which had recently installed a drip irrigation scheme. There, some of the fumigation and fertilizer applications came directly through the drip system, controlled by a small squad of four and those in charge of the laboratory. Polo explained that before the pruning of plants there are at least two hoeings, for which male workers are preferred. The right moment for hoeing is after planting when the soil is between being dry and humid, but it also depends on the amount of weed cover. Generally, hoeing is done in a maximum period of ten days. Squads of 25 to

30 workers are organized to cover an extension of 20 hectares over six days. After hoeing the tractor driver complements the cultivation by spreading more fertilizer and mounding the furrows.

The next task is pruning. For this, workers have to know the variety of tomato planted. For some varieties only the new growth is pruned, for others it will include also the foliage. Female workers are preferred for this task. The new growth is cut to the first flower. The pruning is also combined with the fixing of plants to the sticks. To this end it is necessary to make a hole some 50 centimetres deep for putting in sticks 1.20 metres tall so as to tie the plants to the string which links two plants to every one stick. The task of making these holes is called *la poceada* and is one of the heaviest jobs and done almost exclusively by male workers. After inserting the sticks into the ground, the workers who do the stringing and tying up of the plants (*la hilada*) make knots to link one stick to the next (see plate 5 which portrays a woman working in *la hilada*). Every fifteen metres the stringing is interrupted to avoid large numbers of plants being brought down together. Depending on the plant size, up to ten strings can be fixed, but normally there will be only six. It was my experience that the equilibrium of this system was very fragile and a weak point in the production process, due frequently to the low quality of sticks, or to the carelessness of the workers or for other reasons, and new attempts to straighten the plants and to re-establish the string had often to be made. Another company was trying to solve this problem by importing sticks made of hard plastic from the USA or Japan, but they had not yet done so because of the excessive costs involved.

According to Polo, female workers were also more appreciated for *la hilada*. These workers are easily distinguishable by the reels of string suspended from their waists. There is an enormous variation: some workers prefer to carry as many reels as they can, while others prefer to stop and step outside the rows to get more reels.

Sometimes plants do not grow straight, but develop other shoots, the so-called *retoño mamón* (suckers) or *cogollo nacido* (sprouters). This implies further pruning subtasks and can cause delay. Sometimes hoeing also needs to be done more than once or twice, although all cultivation tasks stop when most of the fruit is reaching maturity.

Harvesting

Harvesting is the most hectic time of the tomato season. The prolongation of cutting varies, depending on the conditions of the market, the health of the

plants and the availability of labour, which is indeed very unstable and sometimes becomes the crucial factor. The squads of workers during the harvest are simply called 'cutters'. There is no declared preference for men or women.¹⁵ Polo described different ways of organizing and controlling the work squads. Some squads work without pressure, following the normal rhythm that complies with a specific time schedule. Others do piece work (*trabajo por tarea*) with a target of so many boxes in a given time. The average number of boxes that one worker cuts in a day ranges from 20 to 35.

Later an administrative secretary informed me that at the time of peak production on the ranch where Polo was working, 125 cutters had been involved in an area of twenty hectares, whereas at the beginning and end of the harvest, only 68 workers had participated (see table 1).

Day	boxes	4	356	8	700	12	1350	16	550
1	83	5	328	9	1245	13	1220	17	325
2	150	6	451	10	1429	14	900	18	140
3	233	7	600	11	1495	15	780	19	75

Table 1. The progression of the harvest in Polo's farm

Cutting stops when company owners consider it no longer profitable.¹⁶ However, sometimes the harvest is extended to more than one month. Polo explained that the main task for tomato cutters is to search for tomatoes which have reached maturation point, expressed as *alcanzar el corte*. The importance of cutting tomatoes at the right time is stressed over and over again by bosses and farm heads, who argue that tomatoes have to survive much handling in a short period (no more than eight days) before being sold on the market. Sometimes, especially when the possibilities of selling to the USA market diminishes, the company orders tomatoes to be cut *coloradeandose* (when they are turning to red) for national consumption.

*The packing of tomatoes*¹⁷⁾

The packing plant is organized like an industrial factory. Workers are more confined to a specific position and are frequently required to work overtime (at least 50% during peak times). But in contrast to field labour, they work in apparently better conditions: always in a ventilated area covered by an enormous roof, and they receive slightly better pay (ranging from 5-10% more than *peones* in the field).¹⁸⁾ Most of these workers belong to a trade union. However, they describe the union as being 'white' (a trick) a designation that goes back to the time of the Mexican revolution and refers to the attempt of hacendados to avoid government expropriation of hacienda land falling into the hands of the fighters and rebel *peones*, by supporting their more trusted *peones*. Such unions are regarded by workers as having been tamed and of being directly supervised by the company boss, and therefore useless for defending their rights, and good only for collecting money from them (workers have to pay 2% of their salary every week to the union). The workers acknowledge that its main function is to present a list of workers. As long as they are on this list they can expect to work until the end of the season. The packing plant is open for a maximum period of only two months. Nevertheless, workers are not packing tomato all that time and not all the workers participate during the season. This depends on the size of the harvest.

The majority of workers in the packing plant are skilled women who come from different regions of Mexico, some of whom have been living in Autlán for many years. Others are itinerant workers who follow the sequencing of different harvests. From November to January they stay in Autlán. From January to May they go to Sonora, Sinaloa or Baja California (to the north-east). From September to November they go to Tamaulipas or San Luis Potosí (in the north-west), and in some cases they also go to the season in the central areas of Mexico such as Guanajuato, Morelos or Hidalgo (see figure IV). Within the packing plant, workers are organized in circuits following the assembly bands where different types of tomato are classified by size, colour and condition. The best tomatoes are called export quality, first and second class are destined for the national market and third class is for regional consumption. But this can vary all the time (see table 2). In the season of 1988, 235 workers participated in the packing plant in at least six different categories: The general supervisor of the plant and his deputy (equivalent to *cabo* of the field), the carriers, box makers and assemblers (mainly men), and the 'selectors, classifiers and packers' (mainly women).¹⁹⁾

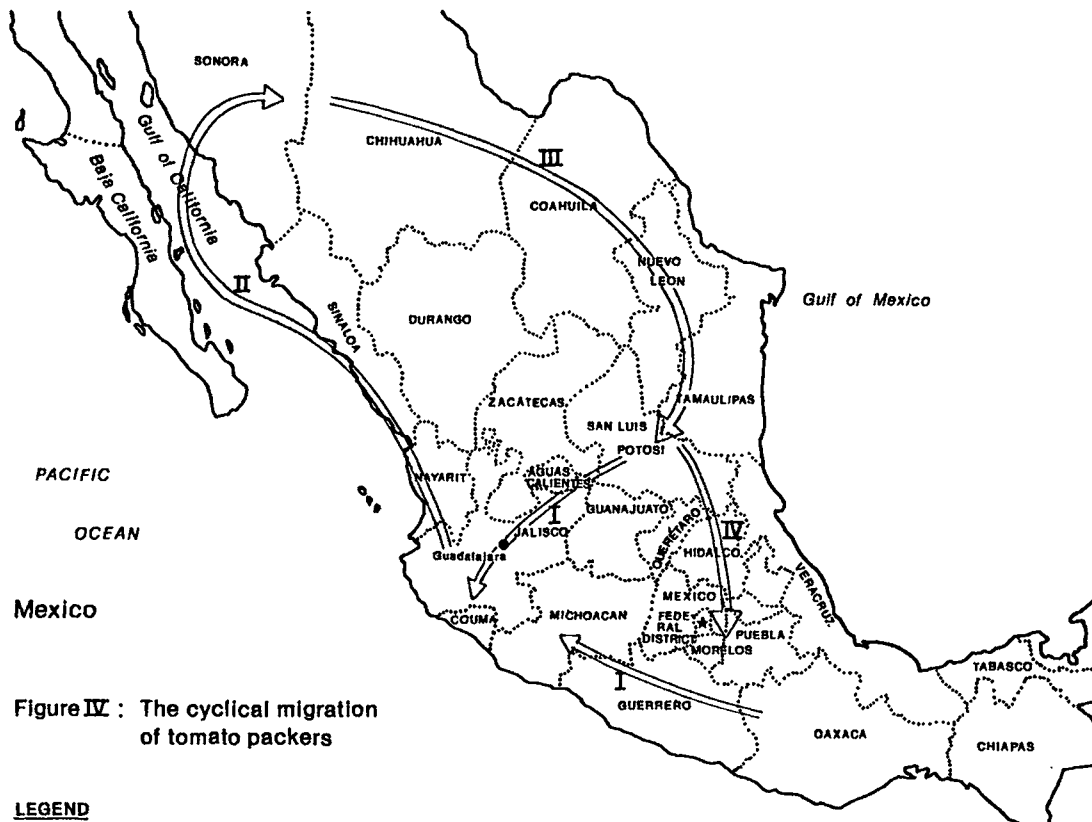


Figure IV : The cyclical migration of tomato packers

LEGEND

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>I : From south or north to Autlan
(november- january)</p> <p>II : From Autlan to Sinaloa, Sonora
and Baja California
(january- may)</p> | <p>III : From Sonora to Tamaulipas
or San Luis Potosi
(september- november)</p> <p>IV : From Tamaulipas to Morelos
Hidalgo</p> |
|--|---|

Quality	%	Local	Guadalajara	Cd. de Mexico	Monterrey	USA
export	30.0					13,264
first	23.4			2,962	7,405	
second	23.4		2,962		7,405	
third	20.1	2,962				
unsold	3.1	1,150				

Table 2. Market destination of tomato production (season 1985, in tons).
Source: Report SARH March 1987 ²⁰⁾

Setting working day priorities

To talk about working day priorities is to talk about interdependent activities that frequently start from and end up far from the tomato fields. They might relate to the various activities and interests of workers of the different company departments and their distant markets, to their offices, communities, encampments, neighbourhoods, residential areas or schools. Workers, personnel and bosses usually interact with different social groups and carry with them different life histories or cultural repertoires that they communicate to each other in different ways. Thus, when workers and counterparts come to negotiate and agree on tacit or explicit agendas or to discuss priorities and ways of implementing tasks and subtasks, these priorities are not decided upon in a vacuum. Whether or not these interactions focusing upon tasks and people can be regarded as ways from the past, reactions to current situations, or a reference to future perspectives, they have an impact on new situations in the tomato field.

Workers always have their own agendas and work plans. Before entering the tomato fields they often have to comply with other priorities relating to their own preoccupations and tasks in household, community or encampment (the so-called 'double' or 'triple' day). These tasks are often also carried out before, during and after work hours (such as piece-work in sewing and embroidering clothes that some female workers do, or the rural crafts of male workers). The organization of household activities, food preparation, looking after or making clothes and the feeding of children, or meeting the demands of husbands and neighbours are the main preoccupation of female workers. It is also not

uncommon for male workers to begin very early in the morning or to be seen after work doing a second job - trading, bricklaying, managing cows, harvesting maize, helping butchers, or transporting foods and other goods.

In this sense, tomato workers start their ordinary working day between 4:30 and 5:30 a.m, depending on the location of their neighbourhoods and villages (see figure V on the daily rhythm of tomato workers). The extent of their involvement in other work will depend on the distance of the tomato farm from their home town, encampment or village. The quality of the transport that workers use also plays a role in working overtime. Workers - especially housewives - have to make lunch for their families before they leave home and to dress themselves in preparation for the work. Such activities, especially the latter, may seem very easy to perform, but sometimes these turn out to be complicated and time consuming. Some of the women told me that they occasionally spend almost an hour cleaning clothes and dressing properly. Variations in customs and cultural expression between Indian and other migrant groups of workers and those from the local town neighbourhoods and villages are often expressed in the style of clothes worn, in the colours and types of jeans. Despite the variations, one could nevertheless say that there are some common ways of dressing as *tomateras*. This is not just a question of taste or due to economic restrictions. It is also a way of protecting themselves from some of the risks involved in tomato production, such as the effects of pesticides on the skin and especially on the face. In this respect, the women take more care of themselves than the men. As one of them explained to me:

"in cultivating tomatoes, the company frequently applies poisonous fumigants and insecticides. For that reason we have to protect ourselves. The plants constantly touch the faces of the workers and it is not uncommon for the poison to affect the skin which can perhaps have bad consequences for our health. We use scarves to protect our face (see Plates 2 and 3). It is also common for at least two or three overlapping shirts to be worn for the similar purpose of avoiding direct exposure of the skin to the pesticides, or to diminish the effects of the sun and to prevent the gum produced by the plants from sticking to our clothes. Sometimes it is also a question of aesthetics. Women from San Luis Potosí (a region in the north of Mexico) are easily recognized by their use of several wraps to protect the face instead of scarves. Normally women wear jeans and a skirt as well to avoid being scratched by the plants, and a skirt also comes in handy when you have to defecate in the cane fields. There is also some sort of competition and imitation going on. If some are dressing like that, others start to dress similarly or differently. They also make use of accessories and jewellery to look more attractive and fashionable which may be discreet or more visible such as the cloth cap, the mini-skirt, etc."

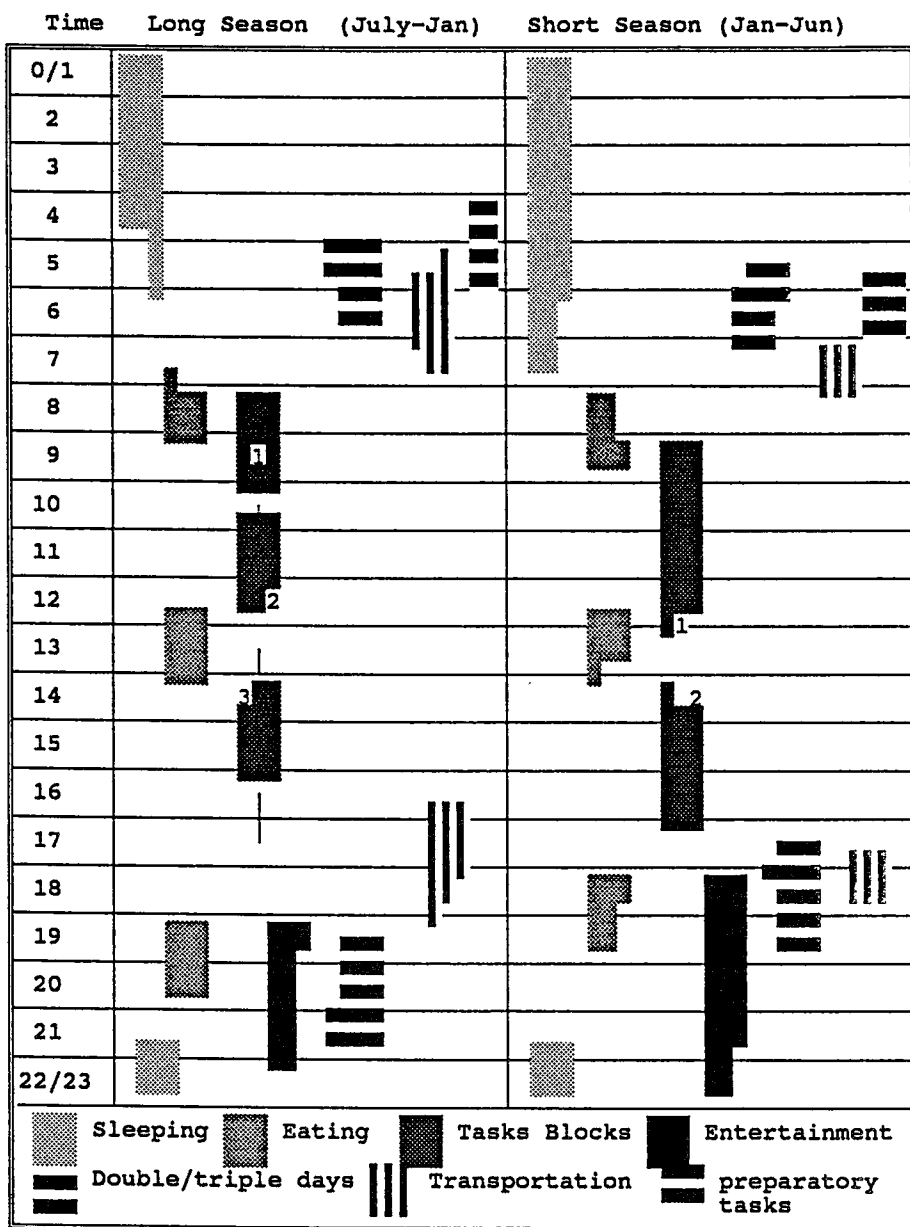


Figure V. Daily rhythm and farming of tomato workers

The definition of priorities in the working day schedule is acknowledged by workers to be the prerogative of the bosses and company managers.²¹⁾ This revolves around criteria relating to *alcanzar el corte*, which is interpreted differently depending on the situations faced by a particular company or individual grower, but more generally by market conditions (USA, national or local), the weather, the technical or social conflicts of organization faced in different forms by all tomato growers in the region. Anyway, behind the concept of *alcanzar el corte* there are some specific patterns of accommodation and rhythm. Some workers gave me a description of how, in the Rose Company, for instance, the priorities for each working day were discussed. This was a practice laid down by the former American owner some twelve years earlier, who had organized short meetings every morning involving all the farm heads and foremen before they started work in the field. Since then, the practice has shifted. A more centralized procedure has been adopted involving only the new Mexican boss and two agronomists (the woman responsible for the laboratory and the man responsible for applying pesticides) and the man responsible for labour management (see organigram in appendix 2). In contrast, in the Arechiga Company the boss was at one and the same time agronomist and time-checker and he decided, almost exclusively, on the plan for the day.

In both companies the rhythm for carrying out tasks depends largely on the response and initiative of the workers. To some extent, where workers are placed during the working day, although formally settled so as to comply with the requirements and definition of tasks during the tomato season, are not always in accordance with company planning. They are adjusted through explicit or implicit modes of negotiation. It is not surprising therefore that sometimes a group of specialized workers are seen performing ordinary routine tasks and ordinary workers more skilled work. Sometimes changes are unexpectedly introduced into the routine (for example when a farm or packing plant is subdivided to fit in with other needs) at the discretion or interests of workers and bosses. These divisions can be logical or seem senseless. For example, a section to be fumigated can be isolated from other spaces; a specific area where rows of plants have fallen or are damaged may need the attention of the majority of workers for some hours or a whole day; part of the storage space is used as accommodation for skilled workers, or used to prepare extra inputs and innovations for a specific period, or improvised as a dance floor for a party; the place for the machinery and tools is converted into provisional storage; or the shed for the pump is used as a provisional packing plant; cultivated rows are used for leisure for a while or for getting on with three types of tasks by different groups of workers simultaneously (cultivating rows, binding up and fixing plants and cutting tomatoes); or the place to eat is

changed according to the position of the sun, rain or proximity to fumigated areas; or the house of the boss or the farm head is used for meetings, administrative registering or to receive visitors or relatives.

Once I observed an incident which clearly showed how the self-placement of workers contradicted the notion that it is the boss who sets priorities, and which eventually better served his main interest. This happened ten minutes after the working day had started at the Arechiga company. Workers were about to continue the cutting of tomatoes as they had done the day before. The boss came to tell the *cabo* who was acting as farm head that the plan for the working day had to be changed, to take advantage of an apparent stability in the price of tomatoes on the USA market. He suggested that workers be reaccommodated so they could bind up the thousands of plants that had fallen to avoid losing the tomatoes in those areas. Aware that these were peak days in the harvest the *cabo* argued, "but it's now urgent to cut tomatoes on the whole farm. If we set a group of workers to other tasks we will lose more fruit because of the delay in cutting". He added "but in the end, you have the authority to decide, you know". The boss opted for supporting the *cabo* and, in this sense, the 'self-placement' of the workers prevailed.

Reassessing the heterogeneity of tomato workers

We might suppose from the different work situations presented and the ways in which workers intervene in everyday situations that this reflects a heterogeneity of behaviour embodied in their life-worlds, cultural expressions, physical conditions, language, customs, agendas and strategies. However we cannot describe heterogeneity as essentially *a priori* for all workers since we can only grasp the specific characteristics of heterogeneity when they appear in face-to-face social interaction. Heterogeneity as reflected in the dynamics of tomato work has to be seen as a process of constant adaptation to a variety of circumstances, following different paths. But this is not the whole picture. People also act according to or following certain broader patterns. Thus, in the case of tomato workers more precise information on the characteristics of the work force is necessary to understand what is called the labour market or what others have called the 'fabric of *peones*' (Astorga Lira 1985).

Counting 'hands'

Newby (1977) characterises British farm-workers' life styles using the notion

of 'social invisibility'. This is also an apt description for the Mexican case, considering the everyday living circumstances of the workers. On the one hand, it is a common sight in the valley to see the majority of them transported like cattle from their homes to the tomato fields on the back of trucks, ironically turning their intended use for transporting goods to transporting cheap labour, while the lucky key workers and company staff use vans and buses; and on the other hand, they are 'socially invisible' due to the isolated life-styles in which they and their families are encapsulated. The places they live are also baptized with denigrating nicknames. This is not only due to the poor conditions of the houses they inhabit in the peripheral or poorer areas of the town, or remote areas, but above all to the fact that the achievements of farm workers themselves in the production process are not openly acknowledged, only those of the company and individual owners. This is reflected in the thinking of company management which characterizes workers in the first instance as 'hands' (*manos*) for work, similar to the English description of farm labourers as 'farmhands'. But to count accurately the thousands of hands working at any specific stage of the tomato season is a complicated matter. In this sense, the story of the first census of tomato workers in the region is revealing.

Company personnel acknowledged that for many years nobody in the region had been able either to approximate the number of workers employed over the whole tomato season or to count precisely how many had worked during the season on the different stages of production.²² The first actual census of tomato workers in the region was in fact a direct result of the present Mexican-Dutch research project. The researchers were always asking the companies for more precise data on the type and number of workers. Perhaps, for some of the owners knowledge or ignorance about the number and characteristics of people working in the tomato business was a way of averting the dirty competition among companies searching for workers at critical moments of shortage. No doubt the company owners tried to turn the constant asking for data from the research team to their benefit. After an agreement between one of the researchers and the Association of Growers, a census of tomato workers was organized for the season of 1988, and realized in two days of November with the financial support of the companies.

I give here some of these data to account for how many tomato workers are involved in the region, the main differences among them based on gender, age, social status and type of responsibility, and how many are migratory and how many native workers and their specific origins - whether they come from local a town or city neighbourhood or from rural villages from within or outside the region. The census (see González 1988) revealed that the job of counting workers was surprisingly difficult and necessitated the introduction of some

concepts to define the different categories of company workers. To start with, it was necessary to avoid double counting, something difficult to achieve because of the mobility of the workers who were in different fields twice or more times in the same day. To make the count more accurate it was decided to combine the direct counting of people in the field with a comparison of data from different farms and companies at the same time. It was recognized that in some farms, where the urgency of harvesting tomatoes was at its height, the data were less reliable because the workers moved around all the time. Comparing the census data with the list of payments and other internal company information, the discrepancies were incredibly high (González 1988: 2). I corroborated this later following the case of the Rose and the Lions Company. In the Rose Company, the difference between the total number of workers registered for the whole season and those counted by the census was 767 workers.²³⁾ In the Lions Company the personnel manager commented that that year the fluctuations had been enormous and that they had suffered - at least five times in that season, and during the short period of one week - the withdrawal of some 300 migrant workers who had come from the south of Mexico and had gone back to their region to attend to traditional *fiestas*, or who had been enrolled by other companies offering higher wages. In this way, he confirmed that in the week in which the census was carried out, they had counted 400 workers less.

The census reported that during two days of the harvesting season of 1988 there were concurrently

- 1) 4,735 tomato workers cultivating 1,367 hectares.²⁴⁾ These workers were involved in production belonging to at least twenty bosses, including the four main companies working in the region (Rose, Vergeles, Lions and Arechiga).
- 2) 44.5% of these workers (2,107) were women.
- 3) The majority (4,105 - 86%) were aged from 8 to 24 years, of which those considered to be working illegally (children from 8 to 14 years) amounted to 1,765 (37% of the total).
- 4) According to the type of task and responsibility assigned, 3,361 (70%) were cutting tomato and were considered temporary workers. Only 127 workers (0.02%) of the 4,735, were skilled and administrative personnel (managers, accountants and bosses), among them only ten being women. Of the 3,792 (80%) working on the farms, only 231 (0.04%) were considered key workers (farm heads, foremen, and heads of irrigation and storage). 942 had jobs in the packing plants, departments and administrative offices (mainly secretaries, drivers, tractor drivers and specialized squads).

- 5) With respect to the origins and migratory character of workers, the majority 64.5% (3,076) came from the State of Jalisco and 35.5% (1,659) from ten other states in the Mexican Republic.

It is necessary to be more precise about what is meant by migratory workers. As Grammont (1986) observes, one talks of migration when dealing with labourers who cannot return daily to their homes. Migration, in this sense, indicates qualitative changes in working conditions, wages and cultural communication. This allows us to differentiate between local and migrant workers, 'local' meaning those workers who can continue to have daily interaction with their communities and homes. Migrant workers are those who have to interrupt home interaction for specific periods. But this is not enough. There is another important difference. One can also talk about internal and external migration, differentiating those workers that come from the same province of Jalisco who can normally return home at the end of the working day, from those who have to live temporarily in camps and provisional shelters.

Internal migration consists of a mosaic of different categories of workers coming from different communities on the same day (see Figure VI). It is interesting to observe that in the Autlán case, the involvement of workers coming from nearby villages and rural communities (mostly composed of small-scale cultivators or *ejidatarios*) are fewer in number than those coming from the urban neighbourhoods of the main towns of the region such as El Grullo and Autlán.²⁵ The number of workers counted as living in these towns amounted to 1,953. This represents 64% (3,014) of tomato workers numbered as living in Jalisco. From this group come most of the key and skilled workers and staff such as farm heads, foremen, heads of departments, managers and administrative personnel, but also most of the children and young students considered to be illegal workers.²⁶ External migration includes workers who came from other Mexican provinces (see Figure VII). Most of them (56.8%) came from the Aguascalientes and San Luis Potosí regions where agriculture (rain-fed cultivation) and cultural conditions are similar to Autlán. The manager of personnel of the Lions Company argued also that the squads from San Luis Potosí and Aguascalientes are convenient for the companies as they are the most inclined to work and have the least propensity to rebel. Indian workers who speak native languages (from Guerrero and Oaxaca in the south) represented a second group of importance. They are described by the Lions manager as conflictive, quick to rebel or to escape to work for other companies, inclined to consume drugs and engage in thievery. The 7% coming from Sinaloa in the north are among the skilled packers who are itinerant workers following the seasons of the different regions.

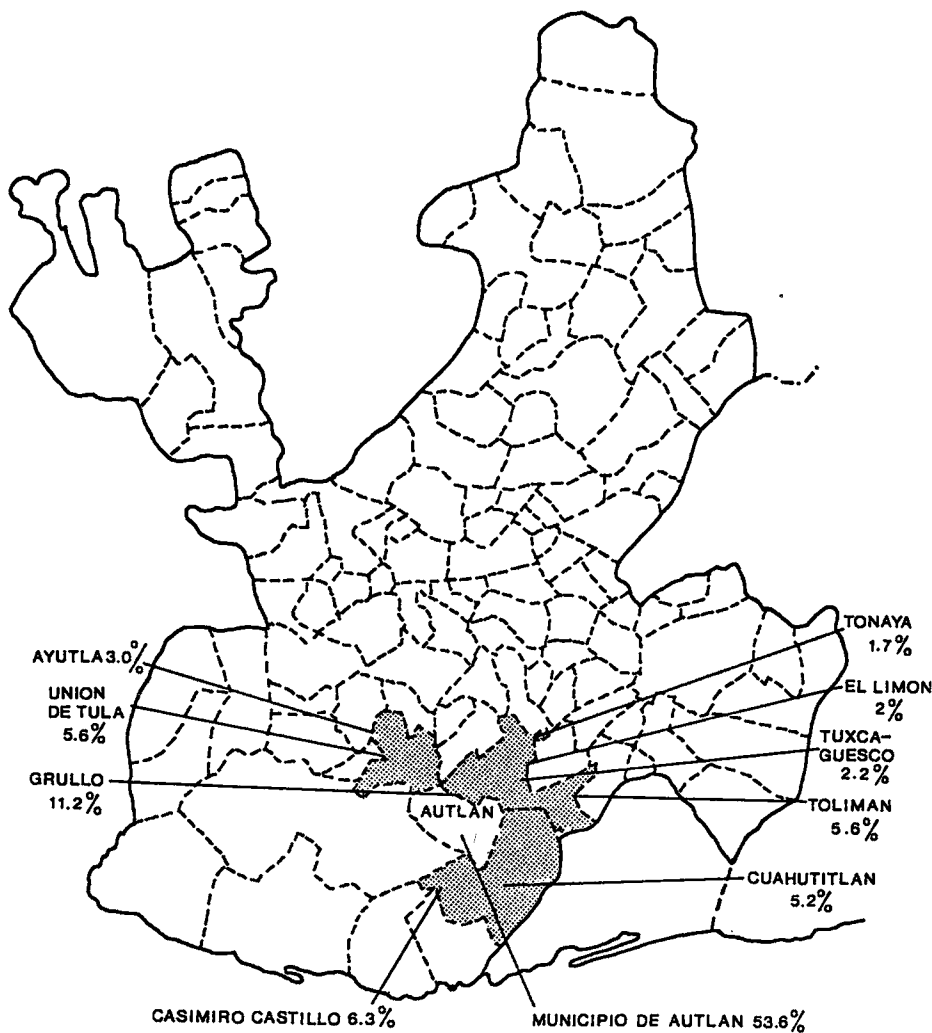


Figure VI: Origin of the workers from Jalisco.

Source: Gonzalez, Humberto (1988) census tomato workers.

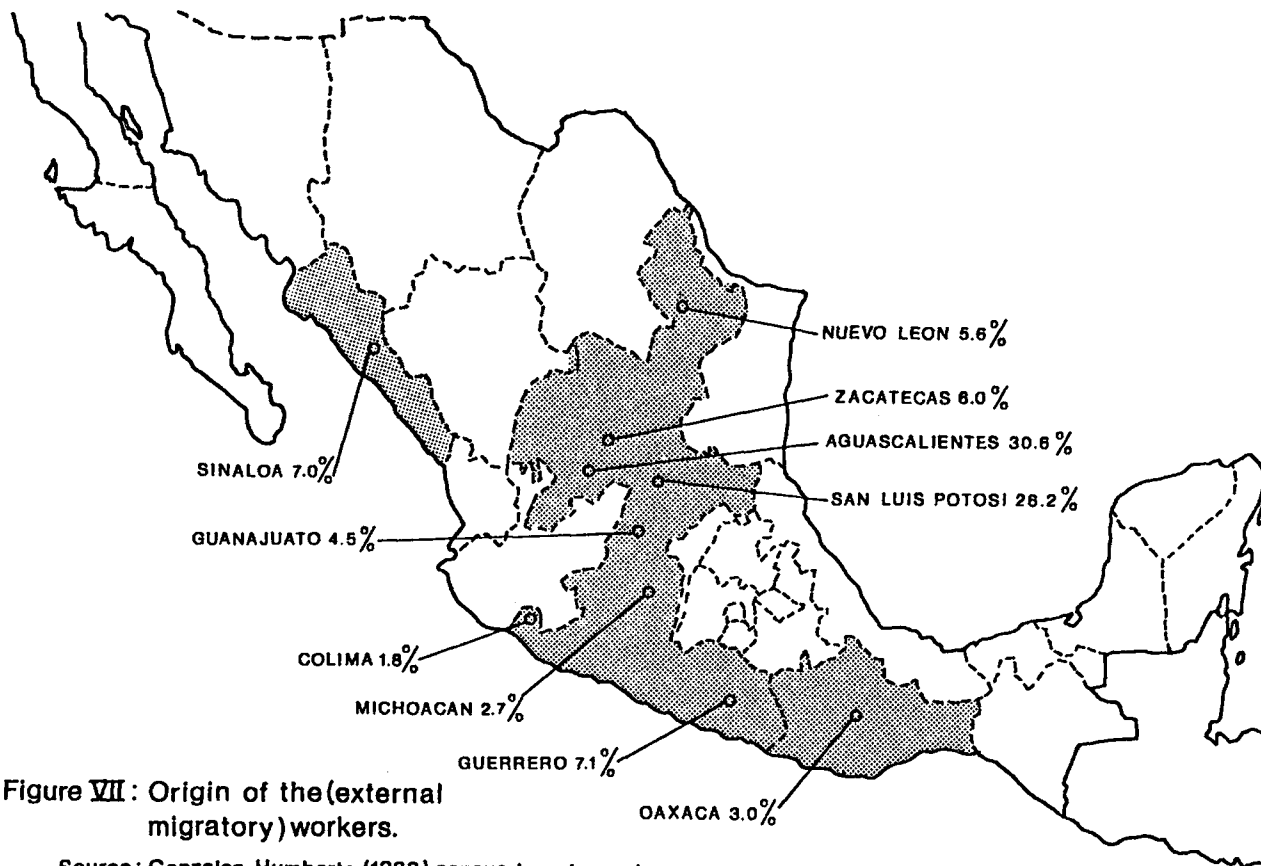


Figure VII: Origin of the (external migratory) workers.

Source: Gonzalez, Humberto (1988) census tomato workers.

The census simplified the characterization of tasks and responsibilities of the workers, which in company registers are more clearly specified into tasks and subtasks. Nor did it look at the number of workers belonging to unions, maybe because of the reputation of these unions. According to union data, in 1988 only 543 workers were registered (11.5%), all of whom worked in the packing plants of the Rose and Vergeles companies.

The labour market and recruitment of workers

Literature on agricultural labourers mostly describes the labour market as a quasi-mechanical system. Some authors depict the working of the labour system as a single track representing the relationships between 'buyers' and 'sellers' (cf Marsden *et. al.* 1992: 11). Astorga Lira's work (1985) is such an example. He looks upon the labour market as a concept embracing exclusively economic processes that take place in particular peripheral zones which produce *peones* as fodder for a general labour market.²⁷⁾ On the other hand, Brass (1990: 52) shows how non-market mechanisms, such as *enganche*, bind the future labour-power of peasants to particular enterprises. *Enganche* (as practised in the Andean regions of South America) is a system of debt-bondage whereby cash is advanced to peasants to cover unexpected contingencies, such as the financing of a funeral or contributions to local religious *fiestas*. The repayment of the debt is required through an agreement to work for the employer (a mining company or capitalist farming enterprise) for a contracted period. The debt must be redeemed either by the individual himself or a member of his family. Sometimes money is paid to an intermediary whose task it is to indebt the peasant and draw up the contract. As Brass comments, "like slavery, this relationship entails the loss on the part of a debtor and his family of the right to sell their labour-power at prevailing free market rates during the period of bondage". Fiona Wilson (1986: 3) goes further to document a number of flexible ways of operating the labour system via "labour contractors, *enganchadores*, paternalistic measures, wage increases, wage advances and in rare cases debt bondage".²⁸⁾ For Mexico, Hirata and others (1986: 105) describe how every year a pattern of seasonal migration from the poor peripheral mountainous areas to the prosperous valleys of Sinaloa take place:

"People stay in the mountains for five to six months (April to September) cultivating their land and taking care of goats and cows. After the harvest of maize or beans they go to the valleys to enrol in planting tomatoes. Searchers, companies and local authorities try through all forms of the media to invite thousands of people to come to work. When some problem (such as

the campaign against drug dealers) interrupts the free flow of migration, as happened in 1983, workers will be scarce, with the result that thousands of hectares are lost. People go back to the mountains when it is time to cultivate their own land in February or March. This ritual is repeated every year; some groups drop out and others continue.. but the more modern and affluent lifestyle in two or three urban centres in the valleys remains very attractive."

Underlying such discussions of the mechanisms involved in the demand and supply of agricultural labour is some kind of conception of the inescapable control exerted by employers and companies over the recruitment and deployment of workers. Hence the whole system is built upon the theoretical assumption that the prevailing centres of capitalist production dominate the so-called 'peripheral' economies.

Such a view is, however, one-sided since it places undue emphasis on 'external forces' at the expense of the dynamics of worker livelihood strategies. An alternative interpretation would seek to explore how so-called 'planned efforts' to enrol workers and their self-enrolment practices are interrelated. Workers are not only cheap or elastic labour with little room to negotiate their price, but are capable and knowledgeable persons with particular skills and commitments. They are also highly differentiated by gender, class, ethnicity, and economic well-being and involved in a variety of power relationships. Workers, sometimes seen as the lowest in status, can be influential in other ways. Thus, interpretations which offer a picture of a single-stranded labour market system for the tomato industry are problematic and unsatisfactory. Both tomato workers and entrepreneurs agree that not sufficient is done to ensure the recruitment of enough labour each year. The workings of a labour market cannot be understood by confining one's attention to a regional ghetto or closed system of control. It has to be seen as interrelated with a complex set of social, economic and political processes (Summers, Harton and Gringeri 1990). As narrated by various workers and company representatives, the tomato labour market combines both, what are called, 'globalization' and 'relocalization' tendencies (see also Marsden 1990; and van der Ploeg 1990).

How workers are hired and get to work

Some workers gave an example of how squads of workers organize themselves in their local communities:

'workers come to work in the company following natural patterns that take account of customs and motivations. Workers will associate with relatives and

friends. If there are no big conflicts they can easily form a group of more than two families and when the group stays together, they can become a squad including people from different localities'.²⁹⁾

One *cabo* of the Arechiga company explained how a knowledge of the process of hiring workers from local villages was crucial for being promoted to the job. "The selected *cabo*", he said "has to try and contact as many workers as he can to justify his position. If he is capable of hiring a group similar or bigger than that of the previous year he can continue to occupy that position". But these spontaneous forms of organization are not enough. As one of the oldest workers described, the fluctuations of the labour market is related to variations in the area cultivated, which necessitates more or less labour, and to the fact that these processes can lead to the exhaustion of what labour is available locally. Workers in search of employment and companies looking for labour ensure the recruitment of labour from places beyond the traditional boundaries of the region. Every year the companies and the workers make new contacts and set up social networks in more distant regions in the north and south of Mexico. The description of workers' experiences when looking for work are useful in tracing economic and social networks and for understanding the interweaving of casual and purposive features. As a former *checadora de tiempo* described:

'Some people came to work incidentally, following information from the networks of tomato workers in other regions. These workers originally wanted only to work for a short period and without commitment. After finishing the sugarcane harvest in another region, they just looked for other employment. Others came after finishing their duties as *ejidatarios*. They sometimes stayed on for the whole season and managed to establish good relationships within the company. After working for one or two seasons they were invited to take the job of recruiting workers'.

This is not to deny of course that tomato companies do not have their established routines and practices for dealing with the uncertainties. They appoint special people to extend the search for workers to new regions. Nevertheless, the histories of those involved in the search for workers indicates that this *recruitment practice*³⁰⁾ depends very much on particular circumstances, and changes direction every year. For instance, the personnel manager of the Rose Company recalled his own experiences. He made trips to different regions of Mexico in search of workers. He would try to contact the workers *in situ* where they might be currently working, and would discover that they had already left for their home communities or had moved on to some other labour centre. Knowing that people had few opportunities for employment

and that the land they owned was poor, he would use this situation and invite people via the local media to come and work for the Rose Company. Sometimes this tactic worked and sometimes it did not. Some of those who eventually came to work for the Rose company became very good contacts for recruiting from their regions of origin. Later his tactic was to focus on talking with the local *ejido* authorities and municipal agents. These he thought were very useful in giving him tips about people who were interested in working. He preferred bringing people organized in squads, around well-known leaders and in most cases these were incorporated as foremen. He explained that the Companies like to maintain a relation with these distant workers and offer special perks such as extra salary, drinks, and food for their families. However, this may also have some negative effects, since it may antagonise local workers.³¹⁾

Other recruiters for the company described how companies would lend money in advance to pay for transportation and food bills. The personnel manager or sometimes the boss himself would promise extra food allowances, shelter, parties, drinks, and payment for overtime or piece work. However, they thought that such promises could have a contrary effect on workers who had experienced such promises not being fulfilled. Such frauds hold especially true for the ridiculously inadequate housing offered by most of the companies. Normally workers who come to work in the Autlán valley cannot withdraw their labour until they have paid back the money borrowed in advance. Workers describe this as very advantageous for the companies, but not definitively so since workers can change from one company to another or simply go back to where they came from. Workers and entrepreneurs alike agree that the companies are always under pressure for solving labour problems.³²⁾ Entrepreneurs for their part complain that the shortage and mismanagement of workers is one of the reasons why companies lose money, tomatoes and good market opportunities. Another complaint among entrepreneurs concerns the acts of 'labour piracy' and the like that they suffer at the hands of other companies.

The enrolment of workers very much depends on the interest and confidence established between workers and company representatives. This became clear to me when I was talking with one of the most successful labour recruiters who that year had enrolled 235 workers from San Luis Potosí, a day's bus ride away. He had worked in Autlán for more than five consecutive years. When asked about the procedure for enrolling workers, he did not want to explain it to me. This question he found uninteresting at that moment as he was very angry about what he called the most recent 'robbery' by the company, for not recognized the extra-time worked over two days. This situation, he explained, provoked a massive wild-cat strike that lasted for almost a whole day. In the beginning the workers blamed the woman time-checker but later

they concluded that the boss and the personnel manager were mostly responsible. He remarked angrily that the company did not appreciate all he did in looking for workers and that they caused him a lot of trouble because the workers most active in the strike did not understand his accommodating attitude towards the company. He thought that the company was taking advantage of the circumstances, because on that day the tomato harvest was nearly finished. At that stage of the season the risk of losing fruit could more easily be taken. After calming down, he explained to me that when the company needs workers, money is no object. They had phoned him many times to promise him extra benefits if he recruited more workers. He normally received the equivalent of 1,500 US dollars in advance to cover the hire of buses to transport people. This represented an enormous responsibility for him and sometimes he could not sleep for fear of being robbed and not being able to pay the money back. Hence brokers like him were highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the market for labour, to worker attitudes and to unforeseen losses.

Conceptualizing the complexities of working situations

In the foregoing overview of the working day, the season, the setting of priorities and the operation of the labour market, I have examined from different angles the complexities of the work process, where changes in time and space interweave with features of worker heterogeneity. The first part stressed the spontaneity of daily work. The second attempted to trace the medium and long term perspectives of tomato work. The third attempted a framework focusing on the mutual shaping of daily plans or improvisations as expressed in cultural discourse and socio-historical contexts. The fourth used the route of statistics to say something about the characteristics of the labour force, and the fifth tried to map a way through the mechanics of the labour market, using different worker and entrepreneur narratives.

I now focus on the interpretation of the dynamic character of everyday working circumstances. It is not difficult from these accounts to redefine tomato work as a 'localized' and virtually endless range of tasks and subtasks, that together make-up the actual labour process. However, it has to be stressed that what in some situations appeared a clear pattern of how to go about tasks, in others was a blurred picture. Tomato work at the implementing face is characterized by various forms of discontinuity. Hence the position workers take up in the tomato rows, which no doubt complies to some extent with intended and coordinated plans, appears as quite disorderly and serves many purposes.

In order, then to bring a unifying view to bear on daily working situations

and to work out the rationales reflected in the different job placement of workers, I will concentrate upon the different ways of going about tasks, upon the gendered nature of specific tasks, on the status and responsibility attached to them and on the 'relocalization' of tomato work.

Different conceptions for defining what has to be done in tomato work

One can find as many definitions and explanations of the tasks and specificities of tomato work done during a working day or to be done during the season as there are workers and staff. But this leaves only a tower of babel. What is needed is to simplify these diversities by identifying different ways of understanding tasks and working arrangements. I do this by examining three sets of notions that workers and staff use when dealing with the resources of production.

The first concerns the different ways of dealing with the 'natural world', that is how they conceive of their relationship to plants, water, terrain, tools etc. and above all to tomatoes. Differences are expressed in terms of taste, preference, essence, use or utility, to mention only a few. Whatever the different views advanced by managers and bosses, it is of course their business to see the natural world as manageable and profitable. It forms part of their personal *hacienda*. Thus, their concerns are more related to problems of productivity, scarcity or competence, losses, viruses, crises and diseases which affect their earnings. Their notions of, and relation to plants, tools and above all tomatoes are thus mediated by calculations of costs, time, and knowledge about final destinations and consumption. In this sense, the approach they prefer is designed for profit, and to secure alternatives and to solve problems. What worries and motivates them are troubles that threaten the production process, and the prevention and limitation of damage.

On the other hand, workers ways of contact with and concepts about the natural world vary greatly. Groups of workers (not just farm heads and foremen) appear more concerned about making a living from plants and tomatoes and they treat them as friends. Other groups - those inclined to concentrate on enjoying themselves and making the job as painless as possible - are more utilitarian towards the natural world. Workers are mostly concerned with securing themselves jobs and therefore seek to establish a friendly environment in which to work and live. They also express more curiosity about the needs of plants and a concern for how the problems of production are linked to the mismanagement of the natural world. Workers are more afraid of the effects of poisonous fumigations, not only because they represent health risks

or hindrances to their work, but because they believe that the environment they inhabit temporarily or permanently is increasingly deteriorating. They also appeared interested in appropriating rare tools as trophies or as useful for their other jobs. During harvesting days tomato workers look for ripe tomatoes to consume directly in their households or to sell locally. These practices represent ordinary ways of appropriating part of the production, which are not denied them, and may be interpreted as their own way of rejecting the final destination for the produce as contemplated by the company.

The second set of notions concerns the distinctive uses of power and knowledge by workers and company staff. Here I focus upon the definition and performance of tasks and subtasks as a way of analyzing, for example, how decisions and positions of authority interrelate with where workers are placed during a particular day. It is not enough to ask people if workers are in their right places and thus working efficiently. One must also look at the different ways in which workers express compliance with the orders of the hierarchy in the field or the company. Different interpretations and uses of notions of 'affinity, strategy, commitment, market considerations and better forms of organization' are interesting in this respect. Sometimes, as the narrative shows, workers can remove themselves from a situation or mock the *cabo* or boss to express dissatisfaction. In these situations, re-establishing order is more dependent on existing kin ties and other affinities, such as whether workers believe themselves to be working for a popular *cabo* and decent people. Workers also find ways of accommodating themselves to particular tasks and to migration, through their own affinities, knowledge, networks and awareness of limitations. Instructions passed on to them may be interpreted by them as the unfriendly words of bosses, located far from the fields, or they may identify companies with the nice people or comrades they deal with in the rows. The ways in which a relaxed environment emerges does not, of course, always express a planned strategy by workers but rather the pragmatic outcome of situations such as avoiding difficulties (muddy areas) or taking advantage of locations (rows with fallen plants). The path can start as a very simple refusal of one or two workers, but can eventually involve the whole group of workers on the farm. A knowledge of the market, conditions of labourers, money transactions and political relationships make bosses and managers appear more able to shape the definition of tasks and priorities, but not definitively. Such tasks and priorities are mediated by the *cabos* who will use their personal relationship with the workers to get unpopular job placements or tasks accepted, or by the time-checker who uses the card system to sanction workers, or by unions managing lists of workers in the packing plant, or by the labour recruiters who know the details concerning the availability of labour. These

mediation processes are critical for securing support or for diluting potential conflicts.

The third set of notions concerns the changing character and contexts of tomato work and the negotiations entailed. This is especially the case where technical equipment and solutions are adopted. For instance, in collecting sick plants or doing extra fumigations, heads of company departments will bring in workers from their other farms without previous discussions with the *cabos*, and likewise, farm heads and *cabos* may at their discretion use the resources (pick-up, tractors) of the central departments. This often entails daily alterations in the company's organizational chart. Whether looked at from the point of view of the central departments or from the needs of specific farms, good coordination of levels of responsibility, roles and the sequencing of tasks and subtasks cannot be achieved if rigidly fixed. The management of the company's scarce resources, the solution of acute organizational problems, the control of plant health and mitigating the effects of weather conditions cannot be totally achieved without a certain minimum of coordinated effort and willingness on the part of all kinds of workers and managers. It is easier to understand the motives that inform routine procedures and changes by examining the concrete situations involved in implementing everyday tomato work, than from an analysis of office-made plans. The biggest problems are not what might or might not be missing in the formal characterizations of the labour process in the charts or work itineraries at head office, but what is taking place in time and space on the ground, in the situations of particular farms or in taking account of problems at the broader level between farms, or in other working scenarios of the company. This pertains mostly to the solving of labour problems either in terms of supply or organizations. This is mainly achieved through two routes: On the one hand, there is the close contact of *cabo* and squad, or *cabo* and *peones* and their networks, sometimes also between a farm head and heads of departments, and on the other, the continual contact made through walkie-talkies and visits of the boss or heads of departments and the farm heads, leaders of groups of migrants and though less common with foremen and workers involved in specialised work. It is through these networks of on the ground interpersonal relations that problems are solved and which keep flows of communication going between the central administrations and the various levels of responsibility on the farm, and it is in this way that company plans can be reformulated or ignored in the field.

The extent to which this takes place and the content of problem resolving depends on the technical problems intrinsic to certain situations, and to the differences in the priorities set by the different companies. The Arechiga Company, for example, is less rigid in its plans regarding worker placement.

But despite the differences at company level, on the ground problems get solved in a similar pragmatic way. In the Arechiga Company, workers resisted being placed in some rows, not because the area was swampy, but because of prickly grass which affects the ease and speed of work in the rows. The method of transporting the full tomato boxes causes delay and more effort in such a situation, but the approach of the Arechiga *cabo* was as pragmatic as solution as the *cabo* of the Rose Company who rallied the best workers to support her in getting the job done. In this case, the *cabo* redrew the row plan for the workers and rotated the work, something quite outside the consideration of the planners.

The gendered character of tasks

As we have seen, some tasks are gender specific. Female workers make up almost 50% of the labour force. The differences are concomitant with the conditions and the specific criteria of tasks. However, conditions and criteria are not blueprints. For example, hoeing is done by both male and female workers, different contexts. In Autlán hoeing is almost exclusively assigned to male workers as it is seen as a hard task that requires more physical force. In contrast, in Ixmiquilpan, (Grammont 1985) both male and females do the hoeing, the argument there being that women cost less to employ, and are more manageable. Efficiency is not given much importance. Bourdieu (1977) observes that for basic crop cultivation in Algeria, hoeing is exclusively a woman's job. Martinez Alier observes (1971: 87) that in Andalucia the definition of tasks which are done by women vary according to economic, political or cultural criteria such as 'women are more docile than men', 'women are better at tasks which involve bending at the waist', 'women work more meticulously and are easier to supervise', or in general 'all tasks which require stooping or are light work'.

At least in three tasks in Autlán, planting, fixing plants and pruning, women are generally preferred. This appears to be based on a perceived difference in physical strength and skill. Planting requires a high degree of accuracy and strength in the fingers to make holes that will totally cover the roots of each plant. In pruning and fixing plants the emphasis is on precision. What is appreciated is a light touch in cutting young shoots and foliage and in making the required number of knots.

Making large holes to insert rods clearly requires muscular strength and is thus a more specific male task. It is seen as the heaviest task in tomato work. For other tasks, such as applying pesticides and driving tractors or trucks, the

situation is more confused and maybe ideological bias plays a role as well as experience, expertise and access to technological information. There is no doubt that female workers could drive tractors and trucks. There is also no doubt that they can adequately deal with technical information as they do when pruning, sowing and handling the different varieties of plants in the greenhouses. Whether female workers show disinterest in tasks such as the maintenance of trucks, pumps, engines and tools, or are more cautious about tasks considered as risky, unpleasant or unhealthy such as the application of pesticides, or reject these because they have no previous experience, is hard to know, but for female workers such jobs are out of reach. It appears to be taken for granted that such jobs are the preserve of men in spite of the acknowledged criteria that women are more responsible, orderly, less likely to drink in excess and are less costly.

The case of farm head, to which only male workers are appointed, is perhaps more complicated and reveals other features and a male bias at work. The issue not only involve experience, expertise and access to information but attitudes, initiative and the ability to exert authority are also seen as crucial. The farm head has to deal with several squads of workers and deal with a number of different tasks at the same time in which precise interventions and strong instructions are necessary. Female workers are considered to be too gentle and fragile. The bias towards men for such jobs is not necessarily justified, and recently there are some indications of change. Most positions of authority are still occupied by men, but now there are two women agronomists who act as heads of departments, and some of the key secretaries and administrative personnel are women, which confirms that things do not have to continue as before. Nevertheless, it is largely true that jobs done by women are considered to be the lowest not only in terms of economic payment but by their lack of recognition. One may argue that preference for women in planting is due to their dexterity, a quality also needed for selecting, classifying and packing. The fact that these tasks are more efficiently done by women leads to some of the best workers being promoted to *cabas*, but so far this has not given them access to other positions of authority. However, for the key position of time-checker a very different argument for what is required is offered. In the Rose Company there appear to be ethical assumptions underlying the notion that a young educated female worker can perform this job better. A woman is thought more likely to be orderly and have less propensity to accept bribes or justify corrupt practices.

Another important dimension of gender are the dynamics of power relationships within households and their carry over to the tomato fields and vice-versa, for as we saw in the discussion of priorities, home relationships and situations are affected by working circumstances. Women living in the rural

communities and urban neighbourhoods who do not work in the tomato industry, are stereotyped (Cockcroft et al 1982: 48) as enclosed within the confines of their households, with a duty to help their husbands and look after their children. This applies also to women working in the tomato industry, and may also partially apply to women migrants, who although involved in tomato work, are also not free of the burden of household duties. This burden imposes upon women a hectic programme of activities, which drives them into an isolated life style both on the tomato farms and in the encampments where they live. Whatever the situation, women still are left with the responsibility for their children and households. Migrant women have to take care of their children, often carrying them on their backs while working, or they leave them under the shade of trees or improvised shelters in the rows where they work, making frequent visits to see to their needs (see cover). But despite this, an independent salary for women (from their own work, or that of their children) and the constant opportunity to socialize at work and in the associated leisure and social events with other workers, *cabos*, and occasionally with the bosses, opens up new possibilities for access to resources, promotion to other jobs and to less isolated styles of living. This obviously has many consequences and modifies the image of subordination - created by women themselves or imposed by others - which portray women as obeying or acquiescing with their husband's wishes and plans or with the instructions and priorities of company representatives. In some cases, the changing of roles has led to the breakdown of marriages, but in others, some renegotiating of 'the marriage contract' has ameliorated their situation.

One area of responsibility to which women are promoted, and given the wages accordingly, as already mentioned, is that of squad leader or *caba*. These women, like their male counterparts may also act as company labour recruiters, drawing upon their own networks.

The relationships of responsibility and the nature of the tasks

In analyzing the value assigned to specific tasks, it is useful to look at the different ways of expressing responsibility or commitment, and the nature of the tasks themselves. *Peones* or squad members are normally answerable to the foremen and occasionally to farm heads or bosses and company personnel. In the case of migrant workers, their leaders represent the points of linkage and mediation. The responsibility demanded of *peones* is the lowest within the ranch. Only a few (no more than ten) of the 20 to 35 members of a squad are considered to be close to the cabo or farm head and these may be withdrawn to

carry out special tasks and extra-routine activities. More responsibility is demanded of these few than of the rest, who are on their feet doing the same activity from the start to finish of the day. Another type of responsibility or commitment is demanded of company departments workers such as the time-checker, tractor and truck drivers, and those in functions of authority or specific responsibility within the farm - the *cabo* and head. Irrigators, watchmen, storekeepers, water carriers and assistants are given another kind of responsibility and commitment and do quite autonomous and specialized activities. Another point I wish to make here, is that the ways tasks and subtasks are perceived in terms of responsibility and commitment influences in turn the ways the company organizes the hierarchy of tasks. And this will obviously change continually in relation to specific factors such as technology, availability of skills etc.

Unusual tasks that occur and need only a short while to fix, are usually accomplished through improvising along the way or through workers' suggestions. I observed two such tasks - one helping the farm head carry boxes of tomatoes after the breakdown of the pick-up truck, and the other helping the irrigator with an inundated plot. Occasionally special or unusual work over a prolonged period occurs. At such times one or all the squads of a farm may be dedicated to that activity, such as hoeing for example. This was the case when a group was diverted to the lifting of plants. Such work usually derives from changes of priority or from more demanding work for that day.

'Relocalizing' tomato labour processes

A final reflection on 'relocalization' is pertinent here. Van der Ploeg (1992: 21) argues that 'the development of science-based technology materialises as the growing dislocation or independence of the different processes of production from those factors that initially composed its locality and diversity'. More specifically Goodman (1991: 7) insists: 'since tomato production can be genetically engineered with relative ease it is used as a model system by leading agro-biotechnology companies ... on the frontiers of agricultural innovation'. As we saw in the earlier descriptions of working situations, relocalization implies a mutually interactive process, whereby innovations and developments presented as ideal by commercial experts for motivating tomato producers to achieve new market goals, must take cognisance of the fact that local adaptations and initiatives by tomato workers and company staff play a crucial role in creating these new forms of value. Hence the utilization of local forms of organization and value opens up possibilities for a more sustainable mode of

production where what is viable is not the newest fashion but is negotiated according to specific local circumstances. This entails the constant 'reinvention' of the local work process and the simultaneous interweaving and mutual influencing of customary and novel forms. As we saw in the accounts of the labour market, tomato workers enrol themselves for their own purposes and not simply to provide cheap labour for capitalist enterprise. Thus, these processes reflect not only a modern way of operation but a hybrid one, affected by the interpenetrations of different cultural elements. Locality, in this sense, is reflected in the changing identities of local actors. There is not one but many ingredients (speed of technological change, availability of machinery, economic conditions, cultural repertoires, uses of power/knowledge) that direct such processes. Hence, relocalization should not be interpreted as a transitional phase after which one can expect the advent of a new model of development, but rather as a newly-emergent pattern of its own that entails a number of dislocations with previous working arrangements.

In fact, ways of implementing preparatory tasks in the fields, sowing in the greenhouses, fumigation and fertilization practices, the performance of drip irrigation systems and packing, fit more and more with the dislocations described by van der Ploeg. Such tasks fall under negotiated forms of control, shared by exogenous expertise and emergent groups of workers in respect to specific tasks. In the case of the Rose Company, this reflects the separation between departments and tomato fields. Those responsible for the tomato fields such as the farm head and foremen have no direct responsibility for doing these 'specialized' field tasks which are performed by experienced squads and agronomists who act centrally for all the farms. This change has resulted in a new symbol of authority. If in hacienda times the main overseer was distinguished by his beautiful horse and its adornments and saddle, now he is distinguished by his walkie-talkie and pick-up truck. But, as in hacienda times, this symbol expresses changing roles and dependencies and is not only a quicker way to communicate with the boss and the heads of departments.

Other types of disconnection are what van der Ploeg calls the 'superfluity of the quality of labour force'. But within the region companies are still vulnerable to the fluctuations of the labour market for both cheap and also skilled labour. There still persists a high valorization of the work of those involved in the different stages of tomato production, although the increased use of piece-work to motivate workers to make extra efforts, is sometimes to the detriment of the quality of work performed, and shows the extent to which the company is subjected to the requirements of the market. For example, the ways that companies deal with the problem of the quality of rods to fix plants - which I concluded to be a weak point in the equilibrium of tomato production - reveals

how companies prefer to depend still on the skill of cheap labour than import permanent plastic rods from the USA. In other words, the balance cannot easily, and in all stages and tasks, be standardized. This is true even in the case reviewed, where in the near future new technological developments could control the tomato ripening process (Goodman 1991). Such a development would surely change the meaning of the *alcanzar el corte* criteria ruling the tomato season but not universally nor at the same rate. Whatever the future scenario, worker initiatives and adaptations (especially in third world countries), would again present a not insignificant basis for negotiating a more sustainable mode of production which could compete with the most sophisticated and expensive models of organization.

Conclusions

Much of the literature on the labour process and agricultural workers - whether expressed in marxist, post-marxist, functionalist or structuralist terms - reproduces implicitly or more explicitly a representation of society based on the dichotomous notions of development and underdevelopment. This apparently leads to linking changes in working conditions with a conception of modernity and progress based upon some kind of rational model or ideal solution, under which the embeddedness of local values, forms of organization and everyday circumstances are largely ignored. A common and related analytical weakness in this literature is that the dynamic conditions of (in this case tomato work) and the heterogeneity characteristic of workers are reduced simply to matters of organizational variation within some general structure of production. As a result, working scenarios are represented as equivalent to shopfloor environments subject to contractually fixed boundaries and extraneous conditions, which overemphasize measures of control and the extraction of surplus value. Thus, the mechanics of the labour market, advances in technology, the impact of standardization etc, continue to be viewed as powerful external forces which penetrate local processes to which local receivers are subjected. As Long has clearly argued (1992), these explanations do not take into account the fact that actors in specific situations, 'are not passive recipients of innovations' (see also Newby quoted in van der Ploeg 1992) but capable agents who are 'reinventing' the process of tomato work. As Hanna Arendt has emphasized (1958), the creative aspect, always present in labour processes, remains out of the picture in many of these studies. In Chapters V and VI I return to this question of creativity when I explore various forms of joking and avoidance behaviour amongst workers.

In the present chapter, I used various analytical scenarios (the spontaneity of working days, the stages of the season, the hierarchical framework, the heterogeneity of workers and the mechanisms of the labour market) to develop a constructivist approach to understanding the different everyday practices of tomato work. I interpreted tomato work as the effect of different cultural dimensions, thus abandoning the use of 'single signifier relations' (Calagione-Nugent 1992) to cover a multitude of realities. Analysing the nature of tasks and the everyday agendas of tomato workers, I observed how tomato work is gender specific in different contexts and embraces multiple ideological expressions. The use and techniques of power/knowledge in implementing tomato work relates to different work contexts and express changing trajectories of migrant and local workers. My examination of working priorities also revealed that there are no predefined scripts but shifting procedures in the work and in the hierarchies and different definitions of jobs, all subject to explicit or implicit forms of negotiation. The way workers accommodated themselves in the tomato rows by no means complied with the intended and coordinated plans of the management. The process appeared 'disordered' and to serve many purposes. As elucidated in the account of the endless range of tasks and subtasks that together make up the process of tomato work, theoretically interesting tensions arose were thrown up. These will be explored in the following chapters.

For example, if localized tomato labour processes are mostly characterised by different forms of discontinuity, how can we identify methodologically newly emerging discontinuities, and how can we interrelate circumstantial verbal expressions with these practices? In other words, how can we reconcile routines and the changing placement of workers with recurrent and concrete timing and spacing? If there is a continual self-accommodation to tasks, self-enrolment in the market and a self-evident method for executing tasks, how can we look at the interweaving of these with everyday and long term company planning? If companies develop tomato work in an ever-deregulated and flexible contracting situation, how does a company operate to control from a distance, and how is discipline and the coordination of tasks eventually achieved? These questions are the subject matter of the next chapter.

Notes

1. Following van der Ploeg's approach to agricultural labour processes (1990; 1992), I view tomato work as socially constructed by the different actors involved in everyday interactions in the working scenarios of the tomato companies in the Autlán-El Grullo valley. Tomato work is thus a virtually endless range of tasks and subtasks that together make-up this concrete set of labour processes. Viewing tomato work as a social

construction offers the advantage of embracing the productive and reproductive social, political and economic relationships in such processes. It provides a panorama of the various practices, interconnected processes, uses and techniques of power/knowledge, norms, opinions, experiences, interests and forms of consensus and coordination which allow the collective consummation of thousands of tasks of different rhythm, in different periods of time - everyday, seasonal, or yearly.

2. See also Long (1989: 228-31) for a deeper understanding of the concept of emergent properties from a bottom-up perspective. Long emphasizes that emergent forms are not explicable in terms of micro events and suggests that these are intricately interrelated phenomena, ranging from relatively small-scale interpersonal networks, institutional arrangements for organizing people and territory (e.g. as shown by the pattern of activities and interrelations of state agencies in particular local settings), to large-scale political and economic systems. Long and van der Ploeg offer elsewhere a better understanding of structure by deconstructing deterministic notions and abandoning the perspective of structure as explanans. They call for a more insightful comprehension of the construction, reproduction and transformation of social relations in which 'structure can be characterized as an extremely fluid set of emergent properties, which, on the one hand, results from the interlocking and/or distantiating of various actors' projects, whilst on the other, it functions as an important point of reference for the further elaboration, negotiation and confrontation of actors' projects' (1992: 21).

3. Van der Ploeg states that at least six important forms of disconnection occur within local agricultural labour processes: 1) nature from ecology; 2) the once integrated and autonomous structure of the labour process; 3) the quality of the labour force; 4) a specific organization of time and space; 5) its links with the evolution of specific qualities as contained in specific end products; and 6) the family as an organizing principle (1992: 25).

4. See the Chapter by Summers, Horton and Gringeri in *Rural Labour-Market Changes in the United States* (1990: 129-64) for a more comprehensive critique of these approaches.

5. James Scott (1990: 118) suggests that so-called subordinated groups must carve out for themselves social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above. He further argues that to understand the process(es) by which resistance is developed and codified, the analysis of the creation of these off-stage social spaces becomes a vital task. Only by specifying how such social spaces are made and defended is it possible to move from the individual resisting subject - an abstract fiction - to the socialization of resistance practices and discourses.

6. Appendix 2 describes the flows of relationships within this company and identifies those people involved in daily work planning.

7. Martinez Alier (1971: 40) alludes to the Andalucian practice where this job is done by a man called *el listero* (the time keeper). This man keeps track of the pay roll but also deals with the food accounts of foremen and workers living on the same estates (*cortijos*).
8. This account is derived from fieldwork interaction with a group of workers of La Lima farm belonging to the Rose Company. Fieldwork notes, November 6, 1987.
9. Some come an even greater distance over the most terrible roads. It appears that the companies make some kind of deal with the truckers union to supply transport for this purpose. The companies pay.
10. Cf. Martinez-Alier (1971: 68-9) who stresses that, in the case of olive production in southern Spain, sequentiality is not an absolutely rigid pattern. Landowners work with the notion that some tasks are essential while others are not so vital. For instance, the hoeing and earthing of olive trees can be easily left undone for a year, and the same applies to pruning, but such operations as weeding and harvesting of irrigated crops are indispensable.
11. Here I only mention greenhouses briefly. In Chapters V and VI, I describe situations in the organization of work in the greenhouses of two different companies.
12. The landscape of a tomato farm offers a symmetrical view, as marked out mainly by the tractors drivers. The majority of farms in this region are subject to certain standardization in design. The farms are internally divided by roads constructed to allow the entrance of trucks to bring in fertilizers and other inputs, plants etc. The roads are also used by the tractors to fumigate and carry out cultivation operations. These roads separate the 'beds' (the name used to denote groups of eight parallel rows where the tomatoes grow). Within the beds there are various narrow exits, every 70 metres, where the line of strings to fix the plants are interrupted to allow the workers passage to the roads to collect inputs, plants etc. Each plants are 40 centimetres apart, and every two plants are fixed to one rod. In Plates 1, 4 and 6 one can observe the symmetrical landscape of a tomato farm.
13. Plate 4 shows the distribution of the eight rows in a tomato bed. Plate 3 shows a group of eight female workers who work as planters.
14. See Plate 5 which portrays a specialized squad in action.
15. Middleton (1988: 34), analysing the records of harvesting crops in Britain between 1690-1860, highlights the variable predominance of men or women in different epochs depending on contexts and conditions. For instance, times of shortage of male labour (because of war or epidemics), the introduction of technological innovations (such as the introduction of longer and weightier scythes), or other socially combined effects, often produced a kind of deskilling of men or women in harvesting.

16. According to Chano, the farm head, cutting is classified as commercial when in a ranch such as La Lima (with 18 hectares) at least 500 boxes (of 30 kilos each) are cut per day. This means that in this specific season only fifteen of the 30 days were considered commercial. At peak productivity, 1,495 boxes a day were the record. In contrast, in the first day only 83 boxes were cut and on the last, 90 boxes. A precise calculation of the number of workers in relation to productivity is based on the *alcanzar el corte* - that is the moment at which tomatoes have reached maturation or cutting point.

17. Although most of my research focused on events and situations in the tomato fields. I did, however, observe several times the working day in the packing plant. Here I present a short narrative of one female worker describing work involved in packing and include my own observations.

18. Luisa Paré (1977: 130) mentions that in the Valley of Mezquital (the same case used by Grammont), where she did intensive research, packers could negotiate better conditions than *peones* due to the quality demanded and the prestige of this task which only a reduced group of workers could attain.

19. Martha Roldan (1980: 41) explains that in Sinaloa, the most important tomato area of Mexico since 1960s, there is a more complex organization in the packing plants. Tasks for women workers are differentiated into seven categories: packers, selectors, classifiers, revisors, listers, those that *pone tapa* (put on lids) and *cierra tapa* (seal down lids). In the case of men, she identifies at least six other categories such as those responsible for the freezer, *carretilleros* (those that push carts), those that empty containers, stick on labels or stamp the produce, and stevedores.

20. The data available from SARH are approximated.

21. Cf. Martinez-Alier (1971: 40), who describes how in Andalucia, the owner (or the administrator or large tenant) takes charge of crucial decisions in planning the area and crop to be planted, as well as other decisions concerning investments and maintenance of machinery, irrigation equipment and tools, and the definition of the tasks to be carried out. The main overseer (equivalent of farm head), who does no manual work himself, decides on the tasks to be performed daily and has ample powers to recruit more workers. He also decides whether any particular task is to be paid by hour or piece-work. The owner may intervene in cases of conflict.

22. This was not for lack of data, since all the companies collected farm data. It was because no sense could be made of them.

23. The census reported that in the Rose Company 800 workers were involved in 230 hectares. But the data offered by the secretary revealed that in the same season the company enrolled 1,567 workers.

24. Compared with the size and complexity of tomato production in other regions of Mexico such as Sinaloa, Sonora, Baja California, Morelos, and Guanajuato where in normal years more than 100,000 hectares are cultivated, the Autlán-El Grullo valley is a small island. The 4,375 workers, as compared with more than one million mobilised every season in Sinaloa, is a small group. This does not mean, of course, that as a productive area Autlán is irrelevant. As Gonzalez (1991: 112) points out, the amount of tomatoes exported to the USA from Autlán in 1987 represented 1.6% (15,847 tons) of national production, i.e. a fifth on the national scale. This also means that at the particular time of year when the Autlán harvest goes to the USA, it represents the most productive source in the market at that time.

25. This in fact contradicts the unilateral interpretation by Astorga Lira (1985), that views *peones* as linked to small-scale peasant economies.

26. The Mexican Constitution explicitly forbids the employment of children under fifteen. However, bosses argue that they cannot stop the enrolment of children because they provide an essential income for their families and the children themselves would complain of any imposition. They argue in their defence, that they pay them the same salary as adult workers. Where companies establish payment by task, this is likely to disadvantage children who cannot work so fast. Grammont (1985: 91) reports that in Ixmiquilpan the bosses use a more exploitative procedure, arguing that as children do less qualified work they should receive lower wages. He also mentions that some bosses prefer to deal with children or women because they are more easy to control.

27. Using an economic approach, Astorga Lira (1985: 15) has mapped out the regions of supply and demand for *peones* in Mexican countryside. He has also traced - in a somewhat deterministic manner - the mechanisms and structures operating in the rural labour market, establishing the mobile and fixed channels and the different phases of production, distribution and consumption of *peones* as commodities. However, he fails to give a full account of the dynamism and heterogeneity of the production of *peones*. For him, *peones* or agricultural labourers represent the majority of the economically-active population in rural areas. Despite his description of a range of types of *peones* consisting of permanent and temporary migrants cultivating some piece of land, his argument stresses the lack of permanent employment and under-emphasises the role played by more established workers. One concludes therefore, that he sees all those who grow up in peasant families and who cannot afford to acquire sufficient land becoming, sooner or later, *peones*.

28. For Brass (1990: 52) the establishment of a contract (oral or written) is a crucial element which stipulates the disadvantageous conditions for the worker such as level of remuneration and duration and type of work. As Paré (1977: 130) indicates, for the Mexican case, the contracting situation is practically de-regulated and flexible. The form of contract is described as ambiguously expressed in verbal terms and not established in writing. Similar patterns exist in Autlán, except for some key workers and those belonging to the unions.

29. Grammont states (1985: 55) that in Ixmiquilpan Hidalgo (the region previously mentioned by Paré), migrant *peones* used to come as family groups or from the same neighbourhood. Workers coming for the first time normally came through an established group. It was rare for them to come alone. Graumans (1989: 36) writes that in Tizapán (another area of central Jalisco) kinship is the most important factor in the composition of squads, and women do not normally mix with men. In the organization of squads there were two types of workers: a constant nucleus of permanent (normally young females or males) and a changing nucleus of temporary workers. The latter included children, wives and old people.

30. Although some of the workers mentioned some sort of *enganche*, the way this practice operates is more flexible than that of the *enganche system* as depicted by Brass. The bondage is more fluid and the contracting situation more flexible. For this reason I prefer to use 'recruiting practice' to characterize these situations.

31. Grammont (1985) describes how in Ixmiquilpan the local *peones* enjoy better working conditions. The boss expresses a closer relationship, offering them food and is especially considerate to their families.

32. Paré (1977) and Grammont (1985) describe how in Ixmiquilpan *peones* are recruited at traffic circles, in the central market or in the public square of the main cities of the valley. Normally the supply of *peones* (except at planting and harvesting) surpasses demand.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICS OF TOMATO WORK: 'TOMATO INDUSTRY' IN THE CHANGING HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF AUTLAN

Introduction

This chapter examines a paradoxical outcome of interacting with tomato workers. Having related in Chapter II how the researcher was 'feeling at home', i.e. became familiar with, and learned to identify the problems to analyze within the lifeworlds of the researched, Chapter III stressed the difficulty of locating precisely what was happening in such interactive situations when the process of tomato work was constantly being reinvented in various ways. Hence the paradox: namely that as the distinctiveness of the analytical problems arise, so also one tends loses to sight of them in the interaction process itself. Thus the role of the researcher in the encounters, and the problems of how to deal with the issues emerging from the politics of fieldwork is still a question that cannot be identified and established with any precision. In other words, such processes are not clearly defined in time and space, though, as we showed through the profiles of tomato workers and tomato work in the foregoing chapters, some characteristics of what the region under study looks like, and how people live and work can be depicted.

The crucial point is therefore how to analyze the dynamic processes which interconnect the different situations/fields of interaction in which dynamic political processes take place. Applied to the situation under study this implies exploring how customary and novel forms of practice simultaneously interweave and influence tomato work processes and how these are reflected in the changing identities of local actors. Thus, I begin by asking on the one hand, if the heterogeneous emergent 'locales'¹⁾ of tomato work can be considered peculiar to the Autlán valley, and how their characteristics fit within particular contexts and narratives. In any case, what is interesting is to reflect on how tomato work impinges upon the region and how the social entities associated with the tomato industry came into being and are embedded within other social bodies. And, on the other hand, how the multiple cultural repertoires - informed by actors' everyday practices and political rethorics - belonging to this locality

influence and contextualize the specific practices developed in tomato work. In this sense, I aim to examine how the politics of tomato work²⁾ emerge, fuse and interrelate in different situations. i.e. how people working for tomato companies attach to or detach from the influence of the ways of doing politics in other contexts.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first deals with the problem of localizing politics and reflects on the issues and domains emerging in tomato work politics. The second takes a step back on historical processes in order to elaborate on the cultural repertoires and political practices that characterize the nature of political practice in the region. The third section emphasize how the externality of customary forms of a transnational company become internalized and interlock with local traditions of developing agricultural tasks and organizing rural life. It also throws light into how everyday working discipline interweaves long/short-distance control methods used by companies with workers' self-regulatory behaviour.

The problem of localizing politics

Undoubtedly, an analysis of the concrete domains of politics, which examines the mobilisation and maintenance of power/knowledge networks during ordinary or extraordinary, conflictive or peaceful situations, is useful, but an understanding of the issues would not be complete without placing them within the historical processes and institutional contexts involved. What is important is to look at the interweaving of the public and private, the individual and institutional, the global and local and to work with the multistranded and interlocking ways in which politics is reflected within different domains where people attribute meaning to political actions and touch upon issues that throw light on what is defined as political. This is at least a twofold task: first to acknowledge that the nature of politics is mainly expressed through issues deriving from what people do, whether their actions are traditionally regarded as political behaviour or not; and then to focus attention on the embeddedness and interconnections of these issues and actions to reveal the complexities involved. In other words, it implies bringing into the same picture two aspects. The descriptions of the disputes over resources within concrete domains and the use of specific strategies and techniques by people working in different contexts (whether public or private); and second, the identification of the interrelations of different power/knowledge networks that are called into motion.

Thus, what I analyse as 'local' in politics refers specifically to the intersection of practices, such as various forms of problem solving, establishing

cooperation and negotiation between the various actors involved in tomato work, whereby different context of the social life of the region become interrelated. (see also Tria Kerkvliet 1990). As Foucault argues, an enquiry into 'local politics' should focus upon the

'regime of practices' emphasizing that the target of analysis is not 'institutions' 'theories' or 'ideology' but practices with the aim of grasping the conditions which make these acceptable at a given moment. Up to a point these practices possess their own specific regularities, logic, self-evidence, strategy and 'reason' and this is the question to analyze. In this sense, practices are understood as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect. To analyze 'regimes of practices' means to analyze programmes of conduct which have both prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done (effects of 'jurisdiction'), and codifying effects regarding what is to be known (effects of 'verediction'). (1991: 75)

The particular case I explore brings out that historically, some situations and epochs of the Autlán valley are seen as 'extraordinary', where particular ways of renewing social pacts (the rotating of persons in political positions, or conflicts that may underlie changing processes in the organization of production and development programmes) have come to the fore and reshaped the rules of the political game. The issue is to understand what lies behind symbolic and effective authority, policies and strategies developed by actors belonging to different actor-networks.³ This can be examined by following particular actors involved in specific events relevant to ongoing institutional processes.⁴ This implies that institutions are in themselves not essential nor totalities that can dictate global strategies and alternatives for defining the life conditions of all the citizens living within their respective constituencies. On the contrary, local institutions are dynamic processes embodying interconnected practices expressing specific strategies and tactics embraced by different actors such as politicians, political factions and social groups, peasants (agraristas), owners, traders, agricultural labourers and representatives of companies.⁵

Emergent issues and domains of tomato work politics

The fact that the advent of the tomato companies is registered as an important event in the region, not only by historians, politicians and entrepreneurs but also by ordinary people, does not mean that the life of the tomato companies is isolated from government and institutional practice (local, national and

transnational). Thus, although it is possible to look at the distinctive and differentiated modes of company operation (Wickham 1983), one must bear in mind that government and institutional policies are reflected in these. Companies are enrolled by government and other institutional initiatives (i.e. growers associations, producing to particular standards of quality and destination, irrigation infrastructure and other facilities, participating in electoral lobbying and rallies etc.) and this enrolment has direct implications for workers' everyday life conditions. Thus the ways companies negotiate and comply with bureaucratic procedures and observe specific regulations is enmeshed in a constant struggle for legitimacy, in which the number of jobs created, the total wage bill, the hectareage cultivated, the resources and inputs offered by companies and the social security measures channelled through companies, become valuable points advanced when company accounts and taxes come under review. Companies are not reticent - when confronted by politicians and government agents - to argue their contribution to 'the social peace and political stability of the region', even though individual wages, social security and indemnity payments scarcely comply with the legal minimum.

Tomato work politics, however, cannot be reduced to the interface between government agents and companies, even though I give it particular emphasis in this chapter, and make the interface between different kinds of workers, staff and bosses a concern throughout the thesis. Behind the notion of 'everyday politics of tomato work' I assume that workers initiatives play an important role. Thus, work and living conditions of workers which are affected by economic circumstances and political negotiations between government agents and company' bosses, have also to be seen in relation to the negotiations that take place between workers and company representatives. So far we cannot speak about power/knowledge relations displayed in tomato work as defined in terms of macro-strategies designed by the politicians and entrepreneurs. It is more fruitful to define them in the specific intersections of practices and specific issues reproduced by companies' representatives and workers within different contexts. In any case, a dichotomous separation of as 'internal' or 'external' government, or the 'politics of production' (Burawoy 1985) vis-à-vis national or local politics has to be avoided.⁶

John Law (1986: 234) identifies the phenomenon of 'long distance control' as an effect of power reflected through the creation of a network of 'passive agents' who become disciplined and who comply with specific goals and projects put forward by a powerful actor or institution. This question of the creation of a network of 'passive agents' is problematic since such passivity is ambivalent in nature, something I will discuss further in Chapter VIII. Meanwhile, a look back at the images of the dynamic interrelations within

working situations, presented in Chapter III, would serve to demonstrate how complicated is the matter of the translation of instruction codes and values as they become merged with the multiple initiatives of workers.

In dealing with the intersection of practices within the tomato work politics this notion of 'long distance control' that we can translate as the notion used in Chapter III of *alcanzar el corte* i.e. the coordination of tasks that result from compliance with the criteria of reaching cutting targets is of great concern. In this sense, the process of establishing discipline and implementing disciplinary instructions and procedures comply less with a general normative framework and planning. Long distance control can also be a question of short distance control, and 'passive workers' as active. Indeed disciplinary instructions and procedures intertwine in complex ways in the emergent issues of everyday politics of tomato work. The resulting analytical implication is that within specific contexts one cannot separate the standard calculations for production from the life conditions of the tomato workers and their qualifications or lack of them. Thus, the descriptions of practical situations (which I offer in the third section and extend the ethnographic analysis of Chapter III) in which disciplinary instructions and procedures come to the fore - no matter their fragmentary and contradictory character - are useful for mapping company routines for ruling from a short or long distance and to reflect eventually on the effects of jurisdiction and verediction. This implies that companies do not need to negotiate every bit of daily life or working situation and can follow certain established patterns.

The fact that eventually the coordination of productive tasks is achieved and mostly without strong forms of coercion is argued to sustain a more structural approach to analyze working circumstances but this cannot taken as going without analytical difficulties. Hence, Burawoy (1985) talks about 'factory regime', viewing it as an essential element of his politics of production. The basis for his argument is perhaps unobjectionable in one respect, i.e. when he showed how 'an element of spontaneous consent combines with coercion to shape productive activities' (1979: xii). In this sense, he locates the shopfloor of the factory as the birthplace of the hegemony of managers control. However, what is objectionable is to overextend the conclusion that achieved coordination means workers' compliance with an established social consensus. In other words, that the practical implementation of a company policy runs parallel to its normative framework. The next section gives an account of the historical processes preceding and following the advent of tomato companies to Autlán valley emphasizing the cultural expressions characterizing political practice in Autlán contexts.

The socio-genesis of *cacicazgo a la alta escuela*

This section elaborates on what the image of *cacicazgo* presented by Rogelio in Chapter II means, but I deal with it here in a more specific manner, i.e. as the local customary model of power concentration. The challenge is to expose how, despite constantly changing contexts, this customary model became a characteristic of political practice in the region. I aim also to examine concrete political practices and cultural expressions, and to explore the multistranded ways in which this image is socially constructed.

The experiences in work and domestic life of Rogelio, the son of a radical *agrarista*, and an overseer with whom I was interacting, showed how work situations and political issues relating to the region are interwoven. Rogelio's dream - similar to those of many workers whom I met in the fields - to possess a piece of land to practice agriculture in a natural and environmentally - friendly style had not been possible and so he became a worker on the farms of General García Barragán's before working for the tomato companies. General García Barragán, a strong man in local and national politics and an important landowner in the region, was a key figure linking the political networks related to land distribution and economics. Rogelio explains how tomato companies, in order to guarantee obtaining land and important political favours for the stability of tomato production, became enrolled in the networks of this *cacique*.

Rogelio also described how his experience had taught him to look at politics (above all in the case of electoral matters and the affairs of the local council) with a large dose of skepticism. Chatting in everyday situations with the General, he learned to identify the weaknesses of this powerful man and his dependence on workers, peasants and soldiers, whom he had to manipulate in order to control groups of *agraristas*⁷ and politicians. As an overseer working for tomato companies, Rogelio became a critical worker who never submitted totally to the orders of bosses and managers. In trying to understand the political and social control exerted by companies, Rogelio motivated me also to consider with the practices embraced by this *cacique*.

I thus became involved in delving into the life history of General García Barragán and the meaning this had for tomato work processes. Through numerous dialogues with Rogelio, local historians, *agraristas*, other tomato labourers and politicians, as well as data from local archives, I obtained a profile of this *cacique* through the narration of different events by his close group of followers and people of Autlán.⁸ The General appeared able to unite political factions and promote the interests of many people in the region. Eventually, Autlán itself became his 'regional empire'. In this sense, the characters, institutional experiences, changing power circumstances and contexts

around the political and military career of this strong man, became important for understanding local politics.

Trying to understand how the General was able to establish a certain discipline and authority, despite the different cultural backgrounds of people from a variety of regional contexts over more than forty years, necessitated getting to grips with the intricate organizing process of a political clique which allowed the General to maintain under his dominion the restructuring processes in political networks. Sympathizers and followers recreated the image of the General as influential and as an authority in politics. To some extent the ways of performing politically within this clique and the forms of social control which one can identify in certain contexts are interrelated and confer a distinctive character on what is local politics. Thus, examining the organizational forms of a disciplined clique and the alliances with different groups became important for defining circumstances and ways of controlling access to land, information and political decision-making circles.

Starting from Rogelio's interpretation of *cacicazgo a la alta escuela*, I examine how different practices of social control have been generated and how they represent various ways of advancing economic and political interests. This entails spelling out some techniques of power and their implications. I am interested in seeing how these techniques of power are translated into 'specific ways of influencing' which entail the skill or capacity to enroll other people's actions in projects and ideas. This leads to a description of the characteristic style of acting politically with a propensity for taking advantage, for strategizing and manipulating in a sophisticated manner. This means above all that this style was not only an individual methodology tied physically to the strong man or to the collective clique, but represented spread wide cultural expressions and customary organizing practices.

In the following sections I present historical and ethnographical data to show 1) how a group of people interested in promoting the political career of the General became organized into a disciplined clique under the General's command (his actor-network), 2) the role of the reciprocity of favours, discretion and the routines of persuasion and coercion, and 3) how first the General's political ostracism and defeat and the later the development of alternatives designed to support majority interests provide insights into how political strength can be maintained and into the forging of symbolic authority.

The overlapping images of the powerful

Stories abound in the region about the advent of this 'strong man'. He was

portrayed as a poor boy⁹ who in his teenage years, because of his family's precarious position, enrolled in the revolutionary war of 1910. As a soldier he fell into disgrace for supporting the losing side, but when faced with execution successfully pleaded for mercy. Others spoke of how he advanced his career through currying favour with revolutionary groups and politicians. A local intellectual said that: 'On the advice of the head of the army, who conceded him the pardon, he learned through experience how to side with the winner, and managed to stay in favour with those holding important positions in government, without losing face when he suffered defeats'. Thus, although his life-history is mainly coloured by his involvement in conflicts and adventures, he managed to cultivate an image of a military man loyal to Mexican institutions and government,¹⁰ an image developed despite the setbacks.

In fact, the General was for many years politically ostracised after the humiliation of being deposed as Governor of Jalisco in 1947. In the 1950's there were many rumours that he was preparing military insurrection and promoting massive protest demonstrations against the President and the PRI, the ruling party. But eventually he managed to regain the image of the loyal soldier, as head of the Mexican Army, in the difficult circumstances of the student revolts of 1968, when he took military action to dismantle the protest of students, who were concentrated by thousands in Tlatelolco square. This resulted in the massacre of hundreds of them in the Centre of Mexico City. Roderic Camp (1992: 28) gives an account of the words of the General Garcia Barragán when he took over the prerogative of the Mexican President and made the crucial decision:

"OK, Mr. President, it is obvious something must be done. Unless you object, I am going to clear Tlatelolco.¹¹ Then General Barragán turned to his two aides and said, I want the place cleared out. After it was over, he reported to the president, Mr. President, the situation is clear".

Camp argues that although the General's initiative, taken under extreme political pressure, overrode the discretion of the President - a circumstance interpreted by many contemporary politicians as a virtual 'coup d'état' - Garcia Barragán managed to preserve his image of a soldier loyal to the nation and obedient to the civil powers.

How the General was invoked as a regional authority

The General's first most noticeable intervention in the local political scene was at the end of the thirties during the 'Cristero war',¹² when the government

was promoting a more centralized style of intervention. The 'General', as head of the victorious army against the 'Cristeros', was able to influence the selection of candidates for the regional constituencies involved in the war situation. The General's transformation from head of the army to acknowledged authority in the region was facilitated by the fact that many of the peasants and land lawyers (including some key leaders) fighting in the army at the time of cristero war under his command, were impressed by his military charisma. According to one of the historians of the region,¹³⁾ since then, when the PRI took over the majority of administrative positions within regional and national government, the General is quoted in their books as a distinguished party member who had to be consulted when candidates for mayor were being selected. This changed the practice in the municipal elections, replacing 'the myth of the good times of democracy' cherished by the old people of the region, when candidates for the municipal administration from all competing parties were selected openly in public places through traditional forms of plebiscite. The PRI, before eventually suppressing them, maintained for a while the custom of organizing plebiscites. Up to 1930, these plebiscites were dominated by the catholic party, or groups of *agrarias* and liberals, who did not always agree with the plans of the ruling party, or the provincial or national government.

The General was called in to act as authority in intricate conflicts within the ruling party or the local councils, to the effect that local citizens and members of the PRI often had to wait for more than a month for his mediation, since he was living in Mexico City or the state capital of Guadalajara. In 1964, many people were interested in becoming mayor of Autlán but they were unable to get the PRI party to agree to nominating any particular candidate. To be nominated by the PRI was important, since PRI candidates were usually the ones elected in the municipalities (at least up until 1988). At the time the General was Minister of Defence but was in touch with events through some of his close confidants and received visits from some of those interested in getting the position. Eventually, tired of the gossip and rumours surrounding the candidates, who were constantly discrediting each other, the General chose his own candidate - a most unexpected choice, who was the least interested in holding the office - and then informed those in charge of the PRI and the candidate. In this way, the General confirmed himself as an authority in critical circumstances and an 'obligatory passage point' (in the sense of Callon (1986), i.e. as the actor driving the actor network) for those searching for political solutions and benefits. The technique used entailed the advantage of acting with discretion and by surprise. The gain for the General was the loyalty of the elected person, who could rely on the General's support but would govern in close contact with him. Such interventions show how the *cacique* becomes both

spokesman for the ruling party and local citizens.

The formation of the general's clique

According to data from the General Census of 1970, there were almost 100 professional politicians in Autlán (a town of some 40,000 inhabitants) involved in local bureaucratic institutions. For more than forty years popular rumours have persisted in these circles about the General's clique. In an interview with Ernesto Medina Lima (March 11, 1988), a local historian, I was told that the rumours depicted this clique as 'sons of the General'. He also thought that the clique emerged due to the fact that the General was an introverted person who liked to talk with close friends, which then became a suitable way of keeping contact with close friends and thereby with local events. But the clique was never acknowledged as a formal group. The General had enrolled some of the founders who were then allowed to enroll others as members of the political group. Although membership in the clique varied in number and political affiliation, normally the group who shared information and plans with the General consisted of no more than fifteen people (of whom two were women). One or two of them were intellectuals who did background reading for him and provided him with academic and media information.

The General visited Autlán at least once a month. Before the visit, close friends would spread the rumour that he would stay for a few days or for a period, sometimes adding information about the purpose of the visit, especially when important political moves were on the agenda. The day of the visit was marked by groups of people (more men than women) outside the house waiting for the opportunity to talk with him. During the visit the clique met regularly, sometimes inviting other politicians to negotiate or agree to political positions. They organized social gatherings at the General's house where they discussed local matters such as public services needed in the town and region (roads, drinking water etc), how to get more land for small cultivators, improvement to housing, irrigation infrastructure, the creation of agroindustries etc. Another ejidatario narrates¹⁴⁾ how the General liked to reminisce about the Cristero war with those who had been with him on the battlefield, especially with *agrarista* comrades.

Establishing discipline in the clique

One cannot talk about established ways of creating discipline or ritual in this

clique within the PRI, as one can talk of disciplinary practices developed in the masonry or in the communist cells, which also exist in Autlán. What was understood as discipline varied according to circumstances and events. In this sense, the character of the members and style of the General played an important role in achieving discipline. In any case, the ways of creating discipline expressed contradictory features where the 'seriousness' of political and military matters intermingled with 'trivial' or domestic affairs. To imagine how images of discipline fused within the clique, note the description of one of the members:

'As a military man, the General liked to emphasize macho characteristics and discipline (he never smoked or drank), but he was nevertheless fond off gossiping about friends and enemies and could at times be easily influenced by prejudice, stirred by those wishing to have members excluded or gain political favour. When indiscretion, indiscipline or inconvenient behaviour of a member was in question, the guilty person would be asked to wait at the door of the General's house until the issue was clarified. The outcome for the offender could be a fall into disgrace or the regaining of the General's trust or that of the influential accuser. Discipline involved two crucial matters. The first concerned an accurate reading of the General's interests and plans in his absence when opportunities presented themselves. The second implied sharing silence or acting discretely to stop the spread of information and the possible advantages of acting by surprise. Also, rumours were spread about extreme punishment used to reenforce discipline on a close relative or friend, for example, because of their ambiguous attitudes. In addition, an effective way to achieve discipline was to advance political information and guarantee the, defense of particular interests, as well as through ideological discussions'.

Creating social control

The different ways of promoting discipline and commitment to the plans and specific projects of the members of the clique cannot be seen as isolated practices proper to a closed group; they are attempts to gain influence more widely in the region, and as such, can be identified as techniques for creating social control. Although, as mentioned, modes of persuasion/coercion within the clique were mainly tied to the personal style of the General, which, according to some agricultural workers, consisted mostly of unrefined behaviour, emphasized by coarse language. These techniques, nevertheless, tended to create or restructure a network of sympathizers and occasional supporters, who, although outside the clique and not completely trusted and treated with caution politically, were, at the same time, considered as potential supporters who could

be called upon to take part in political rallies and events and treated as people who could be convinced. The motives of people in contacting the clique varied. Some came through suggestions of clique members or from people connected with them. They came to seek advantage, hoping for the General's mediation in resolving problems, or for advice on gaining access to important politicians. Others sought help with work permits as migrant workers in the United States, or to contact important functionaries to get information about the legal adjudication of land, credit and agricultural inputs.

In this sense, one can talk about distinctive 'persuasive methods' (providing opportunities, solving problems and granting favours) that were used within and by the clique to broaden the group of sympathizers, and promote particular projects and candidates for political positions. Establishing such disciplinary, persuasive or coercive methods was a long-term process, developed over the whole trajectory of the clique.

There were situations where persuasion or coercion were more intricately interwoven, situations judged as politically important, such as complaints against priests involved in politics,¹⁵ skirmishes between corrupt politicians, accusations against other small caciques or liberals and communists. The General sought to be directly involved in these occasions. The more problematic situations, such as the prosecution for crimes, sometimes as serious as murder, were considered by the clique as situations that only the General could sort out (another point in the 'geography of obligatory points of passage' within the actor-network). In these situations, the wife, mother or maybe the sister of the accused demanded special protection and help from the General. These cases were treated with more discretion and the General offered his personal intervention when he thought the person in question might eventually be trusted to carry out delicate jobs within the army. Some of these people formed part of his special bodyguard.

The fear of coercion was often present, as two events show, one occurring when the clique was dominant at the end of the thirties and forties, and the other in the sixties when the clique was in decline and suffering defeat. In the early 1940's, one of the members of the clique was killed after some personal quarrels, by a member of a rich family also involved in local politics. The murderer got away with it and was not imprisoned. But some months later, not only the murderer, but also some of his close relatives were killed unexpectedly by people who were never caught, and simply described as strangers to the region. It was rumoured that it was a revenge, organized by the 'invisible hand' of the General. This had a double effect. It reinforced the commitment within the group close to the General, providing a guarantee of justice without waiting for legal bureaucratic procedures; and it broadcast an open message to their

enemies or anyone who might try something against one of the clique. The message was simple. It conveyed that it was not easy to evade retaliation by the group, and that this retaliation could be of the most extreme form. But coercion had another side to it. It frightened and distanced large sectors of the public.

The other case occurred in the context of the Cuban revolution at the beginning of the 1960's and coincided with counter ideological propaganda developed to prevent Mexico from becoming communist. Within the region a priest headed a movement under the slogan - Catholicism yes! Communism no! This movement was addressed to the director of the recently created high school of Autlán, who was also one of the best medical doctors in town. The representatives of a students' committee, in close contact with the priest and members of school board, organized a strike and demanded the dismissal of the director, accusing him of being authoritarian, communist and homosexual. Actually, there was a hidden agenda behind the conflict. The director had made himself a 'persona non grata' among political groups of various persuasions and interests including the General's clique, the rich traders, and catholics close to the priest. For a while the case diverted the clique from their war against priests being involved in politics. On the other hand, this doctor was widely appreciated by the local population, in a region where doctors were scarce. Some of his most faithful patients were members of the clique. The General also consulted him.

But the issue was more than the way he managed the school. He was judged to be politically dangerous, and was becoming too influential in the region through the newspaper he had initiated, in which he openly expressed very liberal views and included critical notes on the misconduct of local politicians. In the face of this conflict, the clique of the General entered an unexpected alliance with priests and traders who were traditionally considered political enemies or who at least mistrusted each other. The General personally played a role. He called the director to his house and told him that he would be killed if he refused to leave the region voluntarily and immediately. The director left Autlán, but the school was closed for more than one year. This case may have created some confusion in the group because of changing political alliances but it reinforced the acceptance of the clique by a large sector of the population.

Retrospective and prospective effects of defeat

Here a methodological observation is in order: the historical events presented conform largely to the interpretations of my informants, many of whom were

tomato labourers and landless who recreated the past in the light of their own life experiences and in particularly their current circumstances. In this sense, there were big gaps in their narratives, with adverse events such as the political ostracism and finally the open defeat faced of the General and his clique between 1947 and 1961, badly identified chronologically. Perhaps the fact that the General died peacefully on the 3rd September 1979 and ended his political career again at the top, underlies a different interpretation.¹⁶ The fact that members of the clique and their descendants still occupy important political positions perhaps influences interpretations. At the time of my fieldwork at least two of the General's closest relatives became important politicians at national and regional level (one of his sons was national president of the ruling party and later a minister and one of his nephews became regional Deputy). In this sense, it is understandable that successful members of the clique would not be interested in talking about past hard times. I had to question them more precisely to obtain a fuller picture. In contrast, some of the radical *agraristas* - previously members of the clique as well - and labourers narrated in detail times of political defeat. They were currently involved in fresh political confrontations with the PRI in the electoral campaign of 1988, and felt betrayed by government agrarian policy which, according to their radical perspective, did not touch upon the relevant problems.

The complexities of social control: how the agraristas recreated the authority of the general to their advantage

The General's authority was socially constructed and forged by his followers, both enemies and allies. Ex-combatants in the war against the *Cristeros* associated the image of the General and his clique with their own interests as *agraristas* in defying the hacendados and rich proprietors. In this sense, since the end of the 1930's, the influence of radical *agraristas*, transformed political values and interests, and changed the course of the events in different domains of local politics, reversing what was considered relevant in different local political spheres and within the clique. These radical *agraristas* pushed forward general demands such as expropriating or splitting up big properties and the use of government resources and organizing efforts to benefit groups of landless pushing to create ejidos. Other specific demands they made were for increasing access to credit, agricultural inputs and machinery for small-scale peasant producers and ejidos. In fact, the General, as some of these radicals described him, was indifferent to the *agrarista* cause. He and his clique had nothing to do with initiating the *agrarista* movement in the region although they eventually

benefitted from it in many ways.

The man who had promoted the *agrarista* movement in the thirties was another military man, retired from the army, Jesus Ochoa Rufz, who had come from Michoacán to work in Autlán as head of the Agrarian Reform Department. He was involved in the land struggles and had been witness to the agrarian policy developed by President Cardenas in Michoacán. These experiences resulted in his increasing enthusiasm for the *agrarista* cause which could count at one time on a core group of 35 leaders and more than 70 ejidos scattered throughout the coastal area. It was, in fact, during his time that the main land distribution and creation of ejidos in the region was completed.

Struggling for at least three years, organizing the ejidos to get credit from the government bank and supporting groups of land claimants, Rufz was able to coordinate massive demonstrations of considerable political strength. One of these took place when he was standing for the PRI in the municipal elections of Autlán against the brother of the General, also a PRI member supported by local landowners and rich traders who had previously been selected by the General. With the support of the *agraristas* and ejidatarios, Rufz won with a large majority, in what was to be the last plebiscite organized by the ruling party, and he became municipal president. After the successful plebiscite he approached the General and his clique. He and the General had met in the army but without becoming friends. He clearly stated (Interview, March 17, 1988), that the General at that time was not identified with the interests of the *agraristas*, and although a respected man and appreciated by them, they considered him as distant for he did not like to interact closely with masses of peasants. He preferred to interact with small groups of followers who acted as leaders in their communities. The changing image of the General for the ejidatarios and a closer identification in political interests came when, at the end of the thirties, Rufz promoted him politically.

This was a move which turned out to be advantageous for both sides. A few days earlier Rufz had lost his job in the Department of Agrarian Reform because of political pressure exerted by wealthy landowners and politicians, who had managed to gain the support of the state Governor. This, however, was apparently not enough for them for they continued to intimidate him to get him to leave the region. But since he appeared to have a close relation with the General (then head of Mexico's military college) and his clique, he managed to regain a more powerful image and later to contact people within the army to fulfil promises that he had previously made to the *agraristas*. One such promise was the possibility of getting arms to set up local groups to defend the ejidos and their leaders. He was also able to re-establish contact with politicians and functionaries of the agrarian reform to advance some unsolved land claims.

With the creation of armed groups to defend ejidos some *agraristas* and land lawyers became bolder in their actions. This coincided also with a period of closer relationships between the General and some of the *agrarista* leaders who had joined the clique when Rufz became a part of it. In this new era of friendship, the General asked to use some communal plots to feed the horses of the army. In this way soldiers taking care of the horses interacted with the ejidatarios. Such association was interpreted as an alliance between government and ejidatarios which later gave them the courage to invade the disputed plots of neighbouring landowners. There are indications that ejidatarios extended their fences to cultivate such areas or cut wood from them.¹⁷⁾

Despite all this, the General himself continued to be disinterested in furthering the *agrarista* cause. Rufz recognized that the General was in favour of supporting some of the landowners leaders within the clique. It was not easy for the *agraristas* within the clique to be heard or to contact other politicians and functionaries. They wasted time lobbying and complained that the General was more willing to support them personally than to comply with the collective demands of their agrarian communities. For example, when someone approached him with an ejido problem, he would enquire instead about their personal needs.

The *agraristas* also had to deal with problematic situations, such as when the General asked for labour from the ejidos to cultivate his farms. It is rumoured that these farms were acquired by the General when he was Governor of Jalisco, by appropriating private land holdings that were legally under dispute by ejidos.¹⁸⁾ Meanwhile agrarian leaders managed to convince ejido members that by supporting the General with unpaid labour, he would reciprocate by helping to resolve land disputes or their requests to expand their ejidos. They were also aware of the fact that by allowing him to pasture army horses on communal land they were making it possible for the General to keep the budget given him by the army for the purpose. The most critical of my informants claimed that the political mobilization of the ejidos and their land conflicts, without considering the well-being of the agrarian communities, The General's family enriched. It was asserted that the General made use of agrarian agitation to infiltrate rich land owners into *agrarista* circles in order to control the 35 more radical leaders.¹⁹⁾

The General's association with the *agraristas* took place during the Presidency of Cardenas, who favoured the *agrarista* movement which at that point was obviously winning the battle. Thus the General had to identify himself as being in its favour. It is difficult to establish specifically how many interventions were made or benefits achieved by ejidos and leaders through the mediation of the General. There was some distribution of land and the credit

provision of inputs for cultivation to ejidos, mostly in the years when the General was Governor. Without such benefits it is unlikely that people would have supported him or hoped for his reciprocation, or would have recreated the image of him as a leader in favour of the *agraristas*. But the General was skilled at exploiting ties with all of them - landlords, rich traders as well as peasant groups.

The agrarista party against the president

As portrayed in Muria's *History of Jalisco* (1982: 606), the most humiliating moment in the General's career was when he was deposed as Governor of Jalisco in 1947, by the Chamber of Deputies, which was dominated by the man who became his successor, Jesus Gonzales Gallo, who had the support of President Aleman with whom the General was no longer on speaking terms. The charge for his dismissal was his refusal to publish an official decree in favour of extending the tenure of the office from 4 years to 6 which would, of course, have favoured his successor. In fact, the General was involved in a very complicated political struggle.

The General used his close communication with *agrarista* leaders to organize groups of voters against the PRI in the elections of 1952. The PRI was at the time headed by his two most hated enemies - Governor Gallo and President Aleman. Under the umbrella of the *agrarista* movement the so-called Henriquista Party (after General Henriquez Guzman) was formed to deepen opposition to the political decisions of the national and regional government. Castañeda (1987) refers to the increasing rumours circulating everywhere sustaining the idea that President Aleman was seeking to be re-elected for a further term, (something not allowed for in the Constitution) and this captured the attention of politicians, social fighters and above all soldiers from different political persuasions who surprisingly unified to circumvent his re-election. Oppositional forces formed a large grouping under what they called the 'Confederation of People's Parties'. The Confederation's candidate for the presidency was General García Barragán's good friend, General Henriquez Guzman. The oppositional party's immediate aim was to avoid Aleman's re-election but they lost the contest against a new candidate promoted by President Aleman himself.

Given the fact that the Confederation of People's Parties was organized unexpectedly and at the last moment, the confederation conducted a very successful campaign and put the PRI under considerable pressure at national level. Within the region the Confederation Party won by a large majority in the

elections. It was acknowledged that the strength of the so-called 'Henriquista Party' stemmed from the large support offered by ejidatarios, land lawyers and agricultural labourers. However, none of the elected mayors and deputies of the region were recognized by the incoming government, who changed all the Henriquistas by members of the PRI.

In the coastal area of Jalisco, the General's centre of operations, the situation turned out to be ungovernable by the PRI appointees in their administration of the municipalities. The new Governor tried to create his own network of Gallistas to control the Henriquistas. The Gallistas unsuccessfully tried to win over and corrupt *agrarista* leaders to divide the Henriquista opposition, who continued to retaliate by invading lands and obstructing the work of local authorities. Later, there was a rumour that General García Barragán was organizing an armed revolt, including all the armed forces of ejidos. The General was dismissed and he retired to Guadalajara. When the rumour of the insurrection emerged, the General came under the special surveillance of a group of soldiers loyal to the Mexican President and he was virtually banished from the coastal region, and thus from Autlán, for many years. It was seen as a political punishment. The rumour of the armed revolt was also used as a pretext to prosecute the leaders promoting invasions and disobedience within the region. Rufz was again chosen as a special target for attack and prosecution. He was accused of murders and eventually had to abandon the region, accepting a profitable position as a customs officer in the national government, in exchange for discontinuing his trial. However, the Gallistas never succeeded in totally dismantling the Henriquistas.

In an interview with Gregorio Rivera, a native intellectual (January 24, 1988), this political conjuncture was interpreted as a 'power vacuum' that lasted for at least ten years. This was due to the fact that after their unacknowledged victory in the elections, the Henriquistas' efforts to remain mobilized and inform their groups or bases were unsustainable. This meant that they survived only in a defensive position. In this situation, some of the *agraristas* opted for negotiating with the Gallistas to participate again in local politics. Others became more desperate, to such a degree that they came to the house of the General to complain, calling García Barragán and Henriquez Guzmán cowards. One of the most radical Henriquistas lost everything - his savings and livestock during and after the campaign, without any political gain. There was a rumour that General Henriquez Guzmán was bribed by the Government with a payment of several millions, the ownership of an industrial factory and special concessions from the army. In the face of the complaints and the debacle, García Barragán recommended that they return to the PRI. For the Gallistas, the method of regaining the confidence of the region and finding a way to

collaborate with the persistently hostile Henriquista Party, was by offering inputs, credit, the means to cultivate and by renewing the discussion about alternative ways of developing the regional economy after the completion of the irrigation infrastructure at the beginning of the sixties. The question of land distribution was not part of this scenario. Governor Gallo and his successors²⁰⁾ appeared to be ready to deliver all the necessary means to improve production in the ejidos, such as fertilizers, ploughs, cows and machinery. But he avoided coming to the region himself, using a member of the General's clique as a mediator to provide, in his name, the services and social welfare to the ejidos.

Thus, the apparent 'power vacuum' could be interpreted as a period of negotiation of positions and struggles for power. While Henriquistas maintained a degree of legitimation and authority within the ejidos in the minds and wills of the leaders of the groups, the PRI preserved formal office and administrative roles. However, in 1964, the reappearance of the General in the political scenario, now as Minister of Defence, brought new changes. Although he never regained the position of State Governor for one of his followers, he managed to reshape networks and promote his followers to important national positions, as well as to the municipalities of Jalisco, and above all in the Autlán/Coastal region. However after the events of Henriquismo, the configuration of the political spectrum changed and the local groups (*agraristas*, traders, catholics etc) become more interlinked. This also carried with it another effect. The expectations of local groups from Autlán to benefit from the General's prerogatives and from his position of authority crystallized as the search for a regional alternative to revitalize the exhausted regional economy. A sugar cane refinery became the centre of interest for the majority of people living in the region.

The 'empowerment' of sugar cane producers

The idea of establishing a sugar cane refinery in the region had been suggested as early as 1950 by one of the radical *agraristas* who became a member of the clique. The General, from his position of Minister of Defence, pushed the project despite provincial government apathy. In this sense, the Governor was forced to go along with the project. This project allowed the *agraristas* to recover their political strength and influence in the region.

In 1965, an economic crisis hit the region after the closing down of Autlán's mining company and the short-lived five year boom in melon production. This created economic recession, increasing unemployment. In order to deal with these regional issues, the idea of building a sugar cane

refinery was widely supported and a 'pro-refinery' committee was set-up²¹). This committee in fact represented a new alliance among local political interests including the Autlán Chamber of Commerce, the municipality, and the ejidos. In a way, the alliance revealed the emergence of domesticated *agraristas* not only coexisting but interacting closely with rich traders and large landowners. One of these landowners, in fact, was an 'amnesty' *cristero* who became secretary of this committee. However, the committee's president was Espinosa *el feo*, the radical *agrarista* who had suggested installing a sugar refinery more than ten years previously. There are some indications that this committee was acting in close collaboration with the General.

The committee functioned for at least two years and was useful in persuading people from the ejidos and the town of Autlán to sign different letters submitted to the Mexican President and functionaries of the national institution responsible for sugar refineries. When the government set up a commission of experts to study the region in order to find the best location for the sugar refinery, the committee offered the labour for measuring the land, and transported and showed functionaries around the region. According to one of these functionaries, they gained the sympathy of the experts who eventually reported positively about the possibility of installing the sugar refinery in Autlán.

General García Barragán was instrumental, by his presence at the final discussions between sugar refinery experts, the President and the Minister concerned, in getting a complete package of machinery that had just arrived from France that was destined for another region of Mexico, allocated to the Autlán refinery. But what was more visible and effective in convincing people from Autlán of his support was his personal donation of the land on which the refinery was to be constructed. Coincidentally this land had also been claimed by a group of land lawyers for many years (see also Van der Zaag 1992: 44).

The sugar refinery represented the reactivation of the regional economy through the gradual incorporation of almost 6,000 hectares of irrigated land dedicated to sugar cane production. Sugar cane was a profitable crop. More than 1,000 families of ejidatarios and 200 landowners of Autlán and El Grullo directly benefitted from sugar cane production. This meant access to credit, technical assistance, agricultural inputs and machinery. Two hundred and fifty new job opportunities within the refinery, and more than 4,000 jobs for cutters were created. According to Van der Zaag (1992: 44) and Guzman (forthcoming), these benefits were mainly restricted to ejidatarios (ex-Henriquistas) who had displayed unconditional loyalty toward the PRI. The view that the sugar refinery project represented the culmination of García Barragán's dream to develop 'his region' is shared by most of my informants.

The monument to the General bearing the legend 'to the soldier loyal to the nation' was erected in Autlán after his death in 1979, and affirms the image projected of him as benefactor of the region.

Autlán and the politics of tomato production

I now wish to explore how the social life of the tomato companies within the region is embedded in the picture of local politics described above and contextualized by the political competition between the association of tomato growers and that of the sugar cane producers. I will look also at some crucial moments of interconnection where the techniques and methods used within the clique, and the personal intervention of General García Barragán, provide solutions that guarantee the continuity of tomato production. The last part deals with the way tomato workers exert self-discipline in tomato work and recreate the social life of tomato companies.

At the time of this research (1987-1988), the five main tomato companies operating within the region gradually increased their area of cultivation over a period of eighteen years to 1,365 hectares, successfully capturing 300 of the 9,000 hectares within the El Operado irrigation scheme. However, managers of the companies like to describe the companies as 'enterprises on wheels', stressing their fragility and uncertain future, where poor harvests forced at least two companies to close in the short life of tomato activity in the region and more have folded since I left the area. The development of a tomato industry in the region has always been subject to competition, enmeshed in political conflict and in the need to gain legitimacy. In this sense, the tomato industry has had to legitimize its existence socially (as an important source of employment), economically (being profitable, with the highly qualified technical use of land), and politically (maintaining good relationships with other influential groups and politicians) vis-à-vis organized groups of sugar cane producers, other farmers, companies, workers and government agents. Although these conflicts do not manifest themselves in any strident manner, they reveal what Latour (1986) calls 'the maintenance of the origins of the local society in the present'. In any case, issues concerned with tomato work, such as environmental degradation (including the increasing exhaustion of subterranean water levels due to the perforation of deep wells), economic bankruptcy and accountancy, compliance with legal regulations (including compliance with minimum salaries and taxes) can be better understood if analysed in relation to political restrictions and the competition for space, political and economic resources, and labour.

The relocation of the 'modern' tomato industry

The origins of horticultural production in the region can be traced back to the 1950's (see also Arce 1990), though people in the area have known for a long time how to take advantage of the hot climate and irrigated agriculture. In 1962, in the neighbouring area of El Limón and El Grullo, the region witnessed a five-year cycle of melon and watermelon production that brought foreign companies into direct contact with local producers and exhausted the fertility of the soil on which they were grown (Arce 1990: 2). The so-called tomato boom started at the end of 1968, when the American company Griffin & Brand signed a contract to rent 38 hectares of land from a private farmer of Autlán. This contracting practice represented a new trend in agriculture and more specifically in tomato cultivation in the region.

In addition to payment for renting land, the contract included two factors that were very attractive to local producers: the building of some infrastructure and the installation of new equipment, both of which would be left in situ after the contract ended. Other aspects of contracting practices had more widespread effects, such as the increase in paid employment and the technical transformation of agricultural tasks due to increasing mechanisation and changes in technology.

Companies came to the region with models for organising key labour tasks that they had experienced in other parts of Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela and the United States. They also took on some workers and administrative personnel from other areas of Mexico and the United States. These workers and personnel were brought in as designers and taught the new ways of cultivating. They were acknowledged by company representatives as useful in adapting the 'micro climate' of the area for the transnational tomato business. The imported model of production followed criteria based on efficiency. This was related to an image of presumed political neutrality by which companies appeared disinterested in developing political ties, relying more on technology, cash, machinery, market advantages and international contacts.

Some workers claimed that cultivating tomato was not unknown in the region. What was different was the technical innovations which favoured production on a large scale and the organization of production in order to comply with market standards of quality. The same workers maintained that the concern of American pioneers was not only to introduce a new way of administering tomato production, but to establish a standard of living and an entrepreneurial style of life, which proved seductive to some of the local landowners who became interested in copying the method and so were willing to dedicate more land to the activity.

In this sense, one might have expected transnational companies to take over most of the best irrigated land in the region using the areas that benefitted from the recently inaugurated irrigation infrastructure constructed by national government. But this was not the case. In fact, companies failed to enrol more ejidatarios and proprietors into their style of production. Instead they were sometimes confronted by hostile reactions from the leaders of the sugar cane cultivators, who identified companies with new landowners who threatened their recently gained predominance in the region since the installation, in 1968, of the sugar cane refinery. Hence, as Arce contends: 'the incoming agro-export companies were forced to organize their ventures on non-irrigated land' (1990: 5).²² The tactic used by companies, which consisted of renting a number of neighbouring plots for the production of tomatoes over consecutive years and to obtain quick profits, was partially successful. This implied that companies were continuously in search of new lands and inclined to pay as little as possible for the price of the productive resources involved. This attitude is characterized by van der Zaag (1992: 39) as a 'mining mentality'. In many cases, after three consecutive years of production on the same plot, diseases (especially viruses) and pests (nematodes) increased and yields fell. Thus, at the end of the contracting time these plots are often depleted and no longer suitable for tomato production and, when the lands are returned to the ejidatarios or owners, elimination of the disease is not easy and the low payment received for renting the land has been unprofitable.

Despite this, the introduction by the companies of new economic practices initially raised many expectations. Indeed practices such as renting, higher wages and more investments, meant there was more cash in circulation for agricultural production, as well as changes in the daily rhythm of thousands of families living in the region and in the ways of implementing agricultural tasks. It also meant changes in power relations. These 'common features' of the process of tomato production perhaps bring to mind Burawoy's concept of a 'factory (company) regime', though here we are dealing with a more heterogeneous situation. Re-structuring working and life circumstances which operate within different contexts of production embrace specific sets of relationships and practices of tomato work. The difficulty of using the concept of Burawoy is that it promotes the idea of an institutionalized pattern that is reproduced coherently, and this is not the case. One can better deal with these restructuring forms and the intersections of practices of tomato work by examining the issues that emerge in concrete domains, which means reflecting on what Robertson (1990) calls the 'global/local nexus', or by examining in Foucault's terms the effects of jurisdiction and veridiction within the practices of tomato work.

There is also the problem of historically establishing an explanation and locating the points of intersection (continuities/discontinuities) between customary forms and innovations. For example, the practice of working by squads is a case where pre-existing and locally grounded cultural forms and styles continue but where the actual ways of operating are reshaped by the accumulated experiences brought by imported and resident migrant workers. This is also the case concerning the recourse to political networks to maintain control in critical situations over the working day.

The working situations presented in Chapter III showed how presently emerging discontinuities in tomato work represent an ironic outcome for the sociologist, who can only in retrospect reflect on such discontinuities, acknowledging analytically that they are chronologically located in the past - a procedure more appropriate to historians. I now reflect on such continuities and discontinuities exploring how they form part of past experiences of tomato work. After several years, the five main companies working in the region, were operating with different ways of organizing production. However, some patterns, such as established work schedules, the ways main tasks are redefined, a hierarchical way of classifying workers from bosses and managers down to *peones*, the various routines for the use of resources such as land, machinery, agricultural inputs etc. are distinctive features of the organizing practices of all companies.

An historical situation narrated by one of the oldest workers is helpful in understanding discontinuity, the interweaving of local customary forms and the new ways introduced by the companies. Following his interpretation, one can identify a process of internalization and negotiation taking place. For example, a working day of eight hours with a break of one hour to rest and eat, was a novelty. At the beginning, in retrospect not so surprising, they had to persuade local workers not to work overtime, since the latter had been accustomed to a different routine which continued until darkness fell. Also, companies initially were willing to settle for a comparatively high scale of wages, equivalent to those in the USA. But one of the local landowners who rented them land was worried that this practice would lead to an undesirable all-round increase in wages in the region with which other farmers and small landowners would be unable to compete. So only smaller increases were allowed to "avoid the bankruptcy of the local farmers".

The search for legitimacy by companies

The changes introduced with the advent of companies were legion and

noticeable in many ways, but some disciplinary schemes prevailed and generated shared outcomes although representing multiple cultural expressions including the ways that workers disciplined themselves. The analysis of two concrete situations is useful to show how companies managed as a last resort to establish control. Through such 'last resort' situations companies maintained governmentality and preserved a stable political environment which allowed them legitimate space for exercising authority through their own means.

One of these situations arose with a spontaneous uproar on one of the Rose Company farms. A group of 80 workers attacked and captured the foreman (one of the experts the company had brought in from another region) in order to put pressure on the company. The workers complained of bad treatment from this foreman and of low wages. To defend himself the foreman threatened to use the gun that he carried with him. Workers for their part were armed with knives and machetes, and were prepared to use them. The American owner, who was also the manager of the company, was quickly informed of the conflict and intervened to avoid people getting killed. For the workers there were two instantaneous and positive results: The owner disarmed and dismissed the foreman, and he agreed to pay the extra wages they were asking for. But the trick used by the company (recorded in the files as lessons for future use by managers and key workers) was to force the workers who had received the higher salary to put their names on a special list, which the company later used as a black list to dismiss, one by one, those who had participated in the conflict.

The companies have accumulated experience on how to cope with internal conflicts, skirmishes and personal clashes in the encampments. Sometimes, the solution is reached via key workers, without the support of the police. Sometimes the company bribe the small local police force to guarantee their intervention when they need to maintain control on some farms and encampments. In the short period of the tomato industry in the region (1969-1992), the companies have at least twice asked for direct external intervention from regional or central government to sort out conflictive strikes with workers. In both cases this was achieved by legal and illegal means, and through the mediation of General Barragán, who was at that time Minister of Defence and a key figure for contacting federal, regional and local government agencies, who could intervene when companies and workers were unable to reach agreement. In one case, when a strike movement continued for more than two days and threatened to get out of hand, it was violently repressed by the army and police, called in from Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco. The leaders were simply reported as 'missing'. In another case, the local branch of a federal union was disciplined by the intervention of a top union official who eventually negotiated the most minimal terms. In both these situations, unofficial talks

were held by the companies with one of the close members of the General's clique to assure quick action.

The violent or manipulative intervention by government bodies in labour conflicts was hidden by the alleged legitimacy of companies. Company legitimacy is argued under different rhetorics and expressed not only in political rallies or in parties with more than social motive, but also through the ideological propaganda of public advertisements with slogans, such as 'This company produces high quality tomatoes, creates thousands of jobs and benefits the nation' - ironic, since in both cases the owners are foreigners. Anyway, the question of company legitimacy is a complex matter that is embedded in the preservation of political stability of the region. This means that it is enmeshed in struggles to promote various conflicting interests, for instance, the need to ameliorate poor living conditions against the need to obtain economic surplus; or struggles for status and power of bosses and managers against those of farmers and workers.

The union of tomato growers and the continual negotiations for better living standards

As we saw above, repression played an important role in solving acute conflicts, but was only used in exceptional circumstances. To guarantee everyday discipline other measures were more effective and also less costly in political terms than repression and manipulation. These included political lobbying and the payment of bribes to key government officials when the case demanded such intervention.

Whatever the explanation, repressive measures were seen by workers as not only a way of putting down rebellion, but as a significant obstacle to the development of a serious workers' union. Workers acknowledge that their failure to form an effective union was more the result of effective company surveillance than worker resistance. But to say that this surveillance is more effective is not to say that it is unproblematic. This, and the increasing competition for resources and political leadership among companies, sugarcane producers, the General's clique, other politicians and tomato workers, warrants a more critical look at conflictive processes involved in the continual negotiation of a disciplinary framework.

Gonzalez (1988) mentions the 1975 initiative of the Mexican government to strengthen the unionization of producers. In principle it was an attempt to allow more autonomy and to improve the capacity of companies to compete for international markets, as part of a modernizing programme in the agricultural

sector (see also Van der Zaag 1992: 36). Promoting the unionization of rural producers and farmers disturbed General Barragán who felt his 'empire' invaded by the 'pro-socialist' initiatives of the new President (Echeverría) and his relatives, from whom he had distanced himself after the events of 1968.²³⁾

The General abstained from supporting the initiative, trying unsuccessfully to curb the advance of such organizations in which some members of the clique were involved, though he continued to support the union of sugarcane producers. The reason for his uneasiness was that the new farmers' association (*Asociación Local de Productores de Tomate*, embracing the five main companies, old hacienda owners and landowners) could achieve quick profits, which made some farmers politically more independent. The General visualized the risk that these groups may enroll in the political networks of the new President. In this sense he expressed his doubts signaling that the process of organizing these associations was not firmly rooted in the local organizing scheme of the ruling party, in other words was not under the control of his clique. This went to such an extreme that his own nephew disobeyed the General and lent his support to the new associations search for more resources and support from the government (Gonzalez, forthcoming).

In principle, an association for tomato growers would lead to better communication between companies on how to deal with technological problems and scarce resources, and above all to provide space for sharing ideas on procedures for dealing with labour problems, and on how best to apply the progressive Mexican labour legislation, of which companies are well aware and which tomato entrepreneurs enrolled in local politics would regard ideologically as unobjectable and an advance of the Mexican revolution. In reality, however, in order to compete, companies prefer to interpret the legislation in a way which maximizes political advantage and concedes only a minimum in the way of paying social security benefits, pensions, indemnity payments or wage increases, that are part of the legislation.

The way the law is applied is more often used as a tactic to attract the best workers from other companies. But there are common points of interest, and, accordingly, companies share information on how to dodge the strict application of the law, which they consider economically unsustainable. They have an effective policy to divide and dismiss subversive workers and at the same time to depoliticise and avoid negotiating with workers. Companies describe 'acting with discretion' as the most acknowledged skill of managers. To act with discretion means to know how to restrict the range of economic concessions to the minimum. However, such criteria are intuitive and subject to pragmatic considerations rather than driven on the basis of an ideal legal framework. While it may seem that the unwritten law is that no worker will ever receive a

high salary, a proper pension and the legal prescription of social security, at the same time companies often try to improve the life conditions of their workers, at least the most skilled. Thus, definitions in the use of legal margins are constrained by definitions of the minimum concession reached in particular historical situations, including the pressure workers exert in claiming their political and legal rights.

Analysing how discipline is established in working situations, however, would not be complete if other interrelated contexts were omitted. In reality, the strength of the companies is relative. They are sometimes weak, especially in economic terms, due to the hazards of agricultural production itself. The owner of one of the companies compared it to playing dice, where nobody knows the outcome until the die is cast. In this sense, companies need to continually weigh up external and internal constraints and opportunities, and enrol others in their networks and projects in order to prevent and search for solutions to specific problems. Their vigilance may be explained by the political threat posed by the emergence of spontaneous or organized workers' movements, which happens from time to time. Such practical manoeuvres give an opportunity to understand the points of stability in the political environment and to see how rules for negotiation over pay and conditions are established, and how companies share some criteria to concede the minimum, though are obliged to reckon with the points gained by workers in previous actions.

Despite the fact that such gains cannot be considered substantial nor definitive since they are often specific measures to fit a particular situation, such as the dismissal of the foreman or a temporary increase in salaries, changes in the work schedules or particular social benefits, nevertheless the memory of an organized strike or disobedience has more effect than an imaginary threat. Bosses realize that mass action on the part of workers is an unpredictable force that can never be underestimated. If a lack of working discipline should coincide with a bad season, this could damage the sometimes precarious economic position of a company. Thus, economic calculations which depend upon definitive numbers and fixed margins, eventually become less important in the setting of concessions, than political calculations that identify the specific timing and spacing of the symbolic minimum concession that is practically but temporarily possible. Evaporating collective demands and avoiding mass political mobilization of workers can hang on the accuracy of such calculations.

It is, therefore, not by accident that managers and owners frequently assume a twofold defensive position in relation to worker management. They like to argue they will be bankrupt or in the red at the end of the season in order to avoid meeting wage demands and perks, and they also complain of the lack of commitment of the workers to the company, as well as about the quality

of their work. The latter complaint is usually directed more at workers from local communities who, according to another company owner, "have bad habits due to the fact that they can easily find another job in the area without being committing themselves to a permanent obligation". Companies acknowledge that they cannot completely control workers. Their approach to norms of discipline is to try to win some advantages and counter the 'bad effects' of the unavoidable desertion of labour. The picture is not one-sided, workers themselves are a full part of the equation.

How workers recreate the social life of the tomato companies

As Chapter III showed, the job opportunities created by the companies amount to four workers for each new hectare cultivated. In 1988, this meant almost 5,000 jobs. This is the strongest argument for company legitimacy which they use in negotiating with government agents and financiers over taxation and claims for more credit and concessions. But one might argue the other way round, that legitimacy comes from the workers who perform these jobs, become self-disciplined in the work situation and skilled in their work. I cannot go into this argument in any detail here. What I can offer, however, is to show how such questions are implicitly connected to other parts of my analysis.

For many years, working for the companies has meant some sort of common activity for large sectors of local communities, especially young people. Such work is given a variety of interpretations. Some, native to the valley, consider that this kind of job creation mostly favours poor families, not only women and young people, but also a lot of children who have previously not been engaged in agricultural labour. This is because tomato work is seen as easy to do, as less enterprising and suitable for people less able to compete for jobs with more responsibility. Some permanent labourers are disenchanted with tomato work because the wages paid for their jobs are decreasing. Only for children and women whose husbands cannot maintain them is working for the tomato companies still one of the best options.

For youngsters, it is also a way of enjoying themselves. For women it means breaking out of the mould that women should only be housewives or work as domestic servants (Verholst 1988: 67). Some of the more 'radical' female workers believe that such work has visibly changed cultural patterns in the region. With the incorporation of hundreds of women into tomato work it has become increasingly accepted that women work outside the house, although the image of women working also conveys an ambivalence. For some people they are seen as loose, libertine and potentially promiscuous. But work for the

tomato companies implies involvement in a socialization process which for a while allows a change of routine from living out on small ranches or in a boring neighbourhood. For landless people it means the opening up of other possibilities for survival. Whatever the reasons, most workers claim to have found different networks and styles of life and feel that despite the low payment the work offers something interesting. Some go on to permanent work in the industry, for others it means a connection with other activities and regions, but for the majority it is only a transitory activity in order to survive.

Looking back at the interactions described in Chapter III with workers such as Rogelio, Alejandro and Polo, one might think that the following statement in Bourdieu's *Outline of a theory of practice* (1977: 18) somewhat extraterrestrial:

'if agents are possessed by their habitus²⁴⁾ more than they possess it, this is because it acts within them as the organizing principle of their actions, and because this *modus operandi* informing all thought and action (including thought of action) reveals itself in the *opus operatum*.'

The point is that if one can understand and take seriously Bourdieu's dictum one has to believe what it entails, i.e. that native experiences of the social world can never grasp the system of objective relations governing their life-worlds. Hence workers' accounts and the researcher's second-hand accounts grounded in workers accounts are objectively insufficient to explain theoretically the meaningful world of tomato work. In this sense, Bourdieu's emphasis on giving more value to hard data such as statistics, prices and curves to characterize the living conditions of the majority and to analyzing the working routine within the framework of institutional and hierarchical situations is consistent. Maybe one could argue that one implication of Bourdieu's statement is that workers are unable to create and maintain self-discipline in tomato work; that is they have to follow 'passively' the instructions of company planners. I believe that this structural perception of 'habitus', although helpful in some respects, is worthless in dealing with workers taken-for-granted ways of doing tomato work as these emerge in the interactions depicted in Chapter III.

When I talk about the taken-for-granted ways of doing tomato work and about the ways workers discipline themselves, I mean the different assumptions by which workers describe the world of tomato companies as something they know and as something that they can express in terms of places of work, changes in routine, common movements, familiar words, tacit actions, silences, common sense, in other words - all those things taken-for-granted. However, these different expressions of the self-evident are not common beliefs and universal meanings shared by all the workers involved in the tomato fields. As

the ethnographical material, not only in Chapter III, but in Chapters II, V and VI suggests, we can distinguish five different ways of understanding how workers apply self-discipline in tomato work.

First, they know what they are doing. This means that they know when they are performing well as well as how to sometimes do things deliberately carelessly. Second, they know how absurd some of the instructions of the bosses and staff members are and how to behave in different situations. Third, workers discern the opportune moments for taking the initiative and doing more than they are asked or paid for, knowing full well that this might benefit the foreman, the boss or the company more than themselves, that it does not guarantee better wages or treatment. Fourth, workers often prefer to accommodate themselves to the different tasks rather than be coerced, as this gives them more room for manoeuvre. Fifth, workers like to decide for themselves the constraints and opportunities for changing the course of actions and for avoiding suicidal moves. Hence they acknowledge to and express different degrees of compliance with their own 'exploitation' or 'subordination'.

Commentary and conclusions: multiple histories, one region?

In concluding this chapter, I spell out some analytical implications concerning the interweaving of the historical processes narrated above. But first let me reflect on how my 'experimental sociological exercise' differs from traditional studies on regional *cacicazgo* and on *transnational enclave* as commonly used (and abused) in Latin American sociological and political economy literature of the 1960's and 70's.

In the present case there is not one history to the story under consideration, but several. *Regional Cacicazgo and agro-export enclaves* are socially constructed via multistranded forms of operation, in which many actors take part, not only the big *cacique*, transnational boss, important politician or mayor, but also local intellectuals and historians, members of political cliques, *agraristas*, traders, catholics, and agricultural workers.

My enquiry into the sociogenesis of the politics of tomato production and its embeddedness in regional contexts revealed the complex interrelations of actor networks. Rotations in command, changes in the composition of actor networks during different circumstances expressed the actual significance of expected or unexpected actions located in different institutional domains such as the municipality of Autlán, the Agrarian Reform Agency, the Church, the preparatory school, the ejidos, the tomato companies and the sugar cane refinery and occasionally in national or regional institutions such as the Mexican

Presidency, Ministries and the provincial government. Private arenas such as the General's house, organizing processes such as the clique, company planning department, the Association of Producers, the spontaneous union of workers, the constant negotiations over living standards, worker conflicts, all became reference points of interaction where underlying emergent properties/issues such as the changing images of authority and its use for various purposes, the recurring argument of the legitimacy of companies working in particular regions, the modalities of making discipline and social control and the contingent nature of institutional normative practices defined what was the subject matter of local politics.

The analytical outcome is twofold. First, the local customary form of *cacicazgo* ceased to be the stable province of the powerful and became a conflictive and unexpected rotation of circumstances of defeat and victory. And second, 'the apolitical model' depicting the operation of transnational companies in terms of work efficiency, technological procedures, more cash and inputs, and market calculations was transformed into a hybrid one in which customary forms, alliances and political favours, friendship ties and loyalty, i.e. local ways of doing politics, became the effective means of guaranteeing the continuity of their productive efforts.

A *sui generis* social order (implying continuing routines and social patterns) emerged as a product of negotiated political stability offering a reference point for agreeing or doing something new without having to negotiate everything afresh. Such a 'social order' does not comply precisely with the letter of the law or with the instructions of the planners.

Practices such as new ways of selecting candidates for municipal elections, ways of solving problems outside the framework of the law (e.g. pardons for murderers, retaliations, fast justice), access and distribution of various economic resources, and above all changes in the composition of command flows within actor networks in different interconnected domains, shape the modalities of power within process of regional *cacicazgo*. The profiles of the forces disciplined within the clique and in other social groups reveal what are the techniques and tactics used such as close meetings, ways of communicating information, receiving and giving of political favours, the alignment of ideological inclinations, diverse styles displayed such as submission, discretion, surprise, radicalism, confrontation or withdrawal. But both modalities of power and the profile of the forces aligned throw some light on the social patterns and alternatives representing the region as a summary of the wills, demands and wishes of social groups facing and bringing the authority (the one who can sort out problems of the region and decide on behalf of government including sometimes the Mexican President) to their own advantage and projections.

In company history, the mining or conquering mentality of the pioneer entrepreneurs is part of the constant shift that takes place, as situations of labour conflict are faced, hostilities of different parties within process of association and competition are dealt with, and bankruptcy, scarcity of resources (above all land, water and workers), viruses and ecological damages are come to terms with. This shift in the modalities of exercising power allowed for different forms of power sharing with farmers who rented land to them, with government agents, the *cacique* and politicians (who were important mediators and underlook surveillance work for the companies) and with workers (who employed many initiatives, self-discipline and self-recruitment). Techniques for sharing legal knowledge and passing on information to deal with labour matters, coordination within the Association of Producers to cope with financial and technical constraints, and the use of minimum concessions combined with covert coercion and sometimes open repression, and a defensive and constant vigilant attitude. Through these modalities of power, it is also possible to show how that hundreds of women, children and landless people find other forms of survival, without developing any permanent commitment to the tomato companies which at the same time characterize themselves as always in the move.

The account presented shows how the changing images of authority, and the ways in which they are represented and deployed for various purposes become significant for understanding local political matters. These images, as Willener (1975) suggests, reveal the dynamic processes interconnecting actions within diverse domains. As we reflected on the case of the General as a military man and influential political figure, his image was forged by symphatizers, followers, enemies and occasional allies and embraced different circumstances and scenarios of action. These images, however, were often of a contradictory nature (the weakness of the powerful is often just around the corner!) and expressed changing meanings not necessarily in a hierarchical or chronological pattern. Among the long list of expressions about the General's image of authority we encounter ones as broad as 'he who can decide in the final instance, overriding the prerogative of the President', 'he who can intervene in cases of situations beyond the law', and 'he who acts with an invisible hand', to more localized assessments such as 'he who choses mayors in the region', 'he represents the interests of the citizens and ruling party alike', and 'who can reunite political factions.

However, this exercise of authority implied a two-way process and mutual enrolment. This was clear in the case of the empowerment of *agraristas*. The General himself needed to defend their interests as his own and the *agraristas* considered him their benefactor, despite the fact that he was viewed by radical leaders as apathetic to the *agrarista* cause. The *agraristas* on their part used the

General and his charisma to defy landowners and influence local elections. In the companies a flexible version of the corporate image of authority could in specific and sometimes critical circumstances ignore the rigid organizational chart to which they could on other occasions pay lip service to.

However the political game played by the companies was never totally free and under their own control. Companies needed to enrol other forces to manage or negotiate the different political interests and hostilities involved in labour problems, scarcity of resources and land invasions. Thus, for the solutions of most critical conflicts, the companies depended upon the will of government representatives and resources mobilized within and beyond the region. It is no surprise, therefore, that the continuity of the 'tomato boom' for more than twenty years is explained by some of the American pioneers as a sort of 'miracle' in the face of the bankruptcies, viruses and changes in personnel that most of the companies experienced. Because there was no guarantee for the secure future of the 'tomato industry' in the region the possibility of preserving room for manoeuvre by companies was intricately linked to the ways of conferring their legitimacy through making possible a living for thousands of families (workers, peasants, traders, managers etc.), even though in different local political domains tomato work was a contested terrain subject to continuous situations of negotiation.

What legitimates companies and defines their political viability then is not simply economics and technology but rather the use of power and political acumen in the management of workers and in the making alliances with other political forces. To do so they have to make a contribution to local political stability by fulfilling their basic promise to produce a certain quantity and quality of tomato, generate jobs, boost the regional economy and bring services and social security to an important part of the population.

The issue of creating discipline and social control reveals also the interconnections between social domains. As Foucault contends (1977: 162) discipline tells us about the composition of forces and operative strategies which are intricately entangled. As we saw in Chapter III and in the previous section, establishing discipline implies negotiations over values, definitions of tasks and ways of proceeding in which it is difficult to disentangle actual ways of operating from the rest, for instance, an external model and imported practices from 'traditional' customary forms of tomato work. There are, also subtle or obvious transformations occurring all the time. For example, when a change in scheduling time is established this has an effect on other routines of social life in the local communities, though it is often difficult to distinguish what aspects correspond to which previous form since the patterns of socialization in different places and time always overlap.

In concrete processes, such as the changing practice of discipline within the clique, the shift in the profile of the members offers indications of the targeted or targeting forces involved - trustworthy and discreet, able to achieve political tasks or guarantee a link with important sectors of the population (such as *agraristas*, landowners, traders, catholics, liberals etc). However, discipline involves a large degree of self-discipline and this is only possible through the effective enrolment and some form of mutual reactivation of interests. Company workers accomplish the work while having little commitment to the job and a propensity to take it easy when they can. Companies enjoy the fruits of keeping wages and social security costs low. In the clique members impose self-discipline in order to keep the General's trust.

Looking at the historical process, the issue of the nature of normative and institutional frameworks (no matter if seen as short or long distance control) came up on several occasions. The political rhetoric expressed - at different moments and in different domains - an instrumental and pragmatic way of defining what is legal or illegal in elections, institutional management and labour relations, showing how the law in fact is used selectively. Thus the written codes - not unknown to the parties involved - are not the true or definitive rules of the political game. Political negotiations developed in informal institutional arenas are often more effective. However, such negotiations are grounded in political calculations that the researcher can grasp only partially as the effects of ongoing processes and without knowing all of the implications and outcomes.

As the third section showed, despite the fragmentary and changeable nature of the agreements and normative points put forward by the companies, negotiations over living standards allowed companies a forum and the experience to manage conflicts with workers over for example their propensity to go and work for other locally-operating companies if that suited. Although these agreements are not necessarily registered formally - in terms of contracts and bureaucratic procedures - they become registered as practical examples of what to do in the face of conflicts and workers claims. Thus they have prescriptive effects which establish some precedent (not only rhetoric) for future situations.

A final reflection on the resulting profile of the region is pertinent here. Sociologically it is problematic to talk about a unique region, as being clearly and securely bounded legally, geographically and historically, because it is difficult to characterize in this way the constant extension of symbolic and physical 'boundaries' displayed through the unfolding of actors' social networks. However, while acknowledging the persistence of multiple locales within the Autlán valley, I would conclude that the region nevertheless has kept

its own distinctiveness.

The region, as captured imaginatively by the researcher, is the product of the constant efforts of collective and individual actors who reinvent the region by creating dreams, by organizing themselves or by being enrolled by others in continuous organizing practices, by promoting specific projects and alternatives (such as the irrigation system, the sugar cane refinery, and the tomato industry) which aim to have widespread effects on the region as a whole, not just on atomized and differentiated multiple localities. The value of these widespread effects cannot be ignored. They influence the nature of the political environment (whether it be stable or not) and the potential development of various activities in the region. Thus, these projects interlock people's everyday life offering opportunities for making a living but at the same time the multiple ways of organizing everyday situations by people living in Autlán valley transform the meanings of these projects.

Notes

1. I use here 'locales' in the sense assigned by Giddens (1984: 118-9) meaning 'specific settings of interaction', in which 'the routine activities of different individuals and social groups intersect'.
2. *Tomato work politics* refers to specific issues and relationships of power/knowledge that emerge in concrete domains where activities of tomato industry take place. Female and male workers, staff, politicians and other actors interact, struggle and negotiate their interests, images and prerogatives within different scenarios of tomato work. This conceptualization of tomato work politics differs from the assumption implicit in the concept of 'occupational community' which rests upon the idea of an autonomous social and political field.
3. Callon (1986, 1986b) conceives of an actor-network as an interrelated set of entities that have been translated or enrolled by an actor who is thereby able to borrow the force of the others. S/he acts on their behalf or with their support. The actor who speaks or acts with the support of these others cannot avoid the fact that these others are also involved in other networks. In this sense, an actor-network is a flexible structure mobilized across complex and intertwined power relationships. Actor-network is a concept that tries to reflect on these dynamic power relationships. This makes it different from the usual use of 'social network' which implies a system of interrelated actor-units that, in Carlos and Anderson's (1981) terms are hierarchically constituted. Callon and Latour call their approach to studying power relationships as 'sociology of translation' that aims to identify the methods and techniques by which an actor enroll others. These methods involve: a) specific definition of roles and the placement of actors in specific scenarios; b) the strategies in which the world of an actor renders itself

indispensable to others by creating a geography of 'obligatory points of passage' and c) the displacement imposed upon others as they are forced to follow this itinerary. However, this geography of obligatory points of passage is a circumstantial outcome deriving from the interaction analyzed. This implies that in some way or another, actors (their 'projects', their initiatives, and their resources) become so concerned with others that afterwards they are unable to act otherwise. It does not imply that they pursue a determined scheme or strategy.

4. For the analytical purposes of this chapter I conceive institutions and the historical processes concerning to these in line with Elias (1978: xvi) where he describes institutions as 'consisting of nothing but the actions of people, nevertheless give rise to institutions and formations which were neither intended or planned by any single individual in the form they actually take'. Elias comprises institutions as parts of a global phenomenon of 'civilization' which is a product of the 'many single plans and actions of men that give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created' (1982: 230)

5. Carlos and Anderson (1981) also examine Mexican politics from a social network perspective. However, they follow a different path to Callon and Latour. The crucial difference lies in the flexible character that Latour and Callon attribute to the networks when following actors along different points within the network, not only viewing them from fixed positions. This flexibility allows one to see the different forms of involvement of actors within different networks and to look at more varied ways of interconnecting the different networks. In contrast, Carlos and Anderson regard social networks as integrated into a systemic and hierarchical order rooted deeply in the exchange and brokerage mechanisms underlying a vertical distribution of resources. Anyway, these authors successfully demonstrated the importance of political networks as a basis for understanding the political activity in Mexico. They convincingly argue that networks cut across political institutions and often act quite independently of formal political organizations and structures. However, they do not go far enough in that they look at the dynamics of these networks as a quasimechanical performance overemphasizing their coercive nature and start from the top vertical positions (see also Cornelius (1988). What is missing is the way legitimacy is built up through the process and how variations, interruptions and interconnections of networks are constantly developed. The way they present the specific forms of maintenance and creation of networks says little about the conflictive nature of the distribution of resources and the real struggles for power. The way people from the 'middle' or the 'bottom' are enrolled and mobilize these networks is also out of the picture.

6. Reflecting on the contemporary discussion of internal versus external dimensions of state Burawoy (1985: 11) differentiates between 'politics of production' versus 'state politics', considering state politics as the 'politics of politics'. This perhaps leads to a misleading perspective underlying the semi-autonomous nature of the productive process and attributes some sort of superiority to state politics, which some authors regard also as 'meta-politics'. This perspective, is consistent with his previous analytical position

(1979: xii) where he expressed the aim of his research process as the 'attempt to understand how consent is produced at the point of production independent of schooling, family life, mass media, the state and so forth'. My way of dealing with 'everyday politics of tomato work' takes a different stance. It tries to reflect on how, in tomato work processes, emerging political issues and domains become interconnected. i.e. my concern is not for identifying the autonomy of different domains but for their interweaving. This means exploring how schooling, family life, mass media information and state policies are revealed within the production process and how these become interrelated through the emerging political discourses of actors intervening in these productive processes.

7. *Agrarista* is the name assigned to people who struggled for land against the hacendados, and more generally to those interested in creating *ejidos*. In the Autlan region it has an extra connotation characterizing those who joined the Mexican army against the *cristeros* at the time of the religious conflicts in the late twenties.

8. During my fieldwork, I interviewed local historians and some intellectuals of the region, in an attempt to get more insight into the life history of General García Barragán. I also collected data from local archives and newspapers. However, talking with members of the General's clique, old peasants, ex-workers and witnesses of events offered me an additional meaningful perspective. The data presented in this section derives from this fieldwork material. Needless to say, this does not represent an exhaustive historical enquiry, only an attempt to understand political practice in various contexts.

9. One of these stories from a native intellectual (fieldwork notes, January 24, 1988) tells of his desertion by his father when he was very young. This forced his mother and brothers to migrate from their small mountain village to the town of Autlán, where his mother maintained them by washing clothes in the river around Autlán. The General, recalling these years occasionally, came back to these places to meditate for a while.

10. I look at images here in the sense suggested by Willener (1975), i.e. conveying not only individual features but representing images of society. Willener offers this argument to look at the sources of variation that workers have of society. He reminds us that actors are not only the products of a situation but that they contribute to producing that situation. He emphasizes the potential of images for revealing social processes by pointing to the interrelation of the actions as image-producing situations and images as actions producing (or continuing) situations (see also Villarreal, forthcoming)

11. Students protests lasted more than two months. One of the public places that students used to protest was the *Plaza de Las Tres Culturas* (Three Cultures Square) in Tlatelolco, Mexico City. On 2nd October (the day of the massacre) thousands of students were assembled there. At the time Mexico was hosting the Olympic Games. This put more pressure on the Government due to the international media coverage of

the event. The political climate deteriorated rapidly as the starting date for the Olympics approached, but the negotiations between student leaders and politicians failed to end the conflict.

12. This happened in four of the western states of Mexico including Jalisco between 1926 and 1930. Many priests and some bishops of the Mexican Church collaborated with the hacendados, army deserters and peasants, in defense of their religious beliefs, and organized an armed rebellion against the Federal Government. The aftermath of this conflict ended in the legal separation of the Church and State. The General was the head of the Federal and a volunteer army recruited from the rural population, consisting mainly of landless people and ejidatarios who had obtained land from the haciendas of the region.

13. Interview with Ernesto Medina Lima, March 11, 1988.

14. Interview with Abel García Corona ejidatario of Chacalito. Fieldwork notes, April 13, 1988.

15. A radical interpretation of the Mexican constitution was generally applied by revolutionary groups especially in relation to the involvement of the church in political affairs. Some members of the army and liberal politicians liked to emphasize some articles of the Mexican Constitution such as article 130 which established the separation of powers between the church and the Mexican State and directly forbade the participation of priests in politics. This was, of course, more controversial in an area formerly involved in the war situation.

16. In an short biography of the General, Castañeda (1987: 54) explains what 'peaceful' in this context meant. He emphasizes that the General was, until the last, politically interested in the needs of Autlán and continued to be in contact with his clique and good friends. Ironically, he asserts that he was trying to eliminate from the minds of his followers and sympathizers any idea of *cacicazgo*.

17. Interview with Miguel Nieves, head of *Las Paredes* ejido, April 2, 1988.

18. Van der Zaag (1992: 27) states 'that under suspicious circumstances the General acquired (shortly after becoming Governor) 40 hectares of land which officially belonged to the ejido of Ayuquila. General García Barragán bought a trapiche [a rudimentary sugar mill, normally oxen-driven, that no-one was actually operating] and let some of his soldiers and peasants work the land and cultivate sugar cane'.

19. Interview with Manuel Nuñez, President of the Vigilance Committee of the ejido of Autlán, January 16, 1988.

20. The *History of Jalisco* (op cit. 1982) shows that the influence, agrarian policy and style of government of Governor Gallo extended at least into the two subsequent periods, covering 1948 to 1966. See also Torres (forthcoming).

21. This local committee was initiated in response to the request of the national leader of sugar-cane workers, who wanted to involve a group from Autlán in lobbying to install the refinery there. This man was from Jalisco, and was acting in close contact with General García Barragán and two other Ministers (Education and Agriculture) also from Jalisco, to win the battle within the Government Cabinet for the refinery. One of the actions of this committee described by Guzmán (forthcoming) consisted in bombarding the President and Ministers with telegrams asking for the refinery, arguing that Autlán needed desperately a new source of work. She also gives an account of how, under the initiative of the committee, a group of voluntary sugar cane producers started to produce in the valley.

22. Arce (1990) explains how the tomato companies started to rent the lands of small producers or ejidatarios who owned the best land outside the 'El operado' system and who were in a disadvantageous situation. The case is that ejidatarios unable to obtain credit, technology and other inputs to develop even basic grains let alone tomatoes or sugar cane, stopped producing and opted instead to migrate or cultivate the less fertile land in the valley, without the above benefits, or rented out their more fertile land. The issue of renting land is a complex one that does not simple economic or political arguments. The legal agrarian framework, which changed slightly with the different reforms (1918, 1934 and 1976), still prohibited the renting out of land received from the government as 'ejidal plots', but this did not in practice represent an obstacle to doing so.

23. Camp (1992: 28) gives an account of this distance of both politicians who in fact played an important role in the events of 1968. President Echeverría was Interior Minister trying to achieve a negotiated solution. When Echeverría became President he discretely but openly criticized the massacre of students, indirectly blaming Barragán.

24. Bourdieu (1977) offers in his book different notions of 'habitus'. Perhaps the clearest is that of the 'embodiment of subjective and objective history'. Though some of the interpretations of habitus he uses might be regarded as contradictory. He writes: 'Habitus is the result of an organizing action with a meaning close to that word such as structure' 'a way of being' 'a habitual state (specially of the body and group)' 'a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination'. The problem here is the unsolved tension between the 'generative principle of regulated improvisations or the necessary improvisation of everyday strategies' (p.78 and 179), and the definition of habitus as a 'system of dispositions or the mechanical assembly or preformed programme' (p.214 and 218)

CHAPTER V

WORKERS' POWER AND SKILLS: EVERYDAY STRUGGLES WITHIN THE POLITICS OF TOMATO WORK

Refreshing the analysis on power/knowledge differentials

Powerless, poor, unfree, oppressed, socially isolated, deferential, disorganized, subordinated etc., are some of the terms used in the extensive but pessimistic social science literature characterizing the asymmetrical power/knowledge relationships associated with agricultural labourers. The analytical corollary of such notions, even if academically flawless and properly sustained through various ideological or methodological 'isms', are as boring as they can be frustrating. But looking at the bulk of 'evidence' to support the persistently assumed differentiation in terms of power/knowledge between agricultural labourers and bosses, managers, and politicians, makes it not difficult to see why, if one were to omit describing the hard conditions of the life of subordinated people, one would be accused of not being objective. Yet such analyses imply from the outset the assumption that workers cannot successfully win relevant power struggles or obtain important positions in the company, a point of view I could not wholly support. Instead, as I argued in Chapter I, by presenting such differentials as 'ironies of life', one may avoid attributing a definitive or fixed character to them. This also points to a difficult analytical issue. It is perhaps not difficult to see when an individual or group within a power network lacks power or abandons it, but when power seems to manifest itself as a demonstration of collective will, composed of many different individuals and groups and maybe in association with the initiatives of a charismatic leader, powerful cacique, politician or owner of a company, then it is no longer so easy to see where the power resides, or from where it comes (see also Villarreal 1993: 18).¹⁾ Nor is it easy to see in what ways the disadvantaged may have power, or in what ways the powerful may be vulnerable.

If I cannot, at the outset, offer 'objectivity' by placing tomato workers in asymmetrical positions within power networks to demonstrate their disadvantaged life conditions, what I can offer in this chapter is to look again at what workers

do in their everyday working lives and to rethink what this amounts to in terms of the politics of tomato work. In this sense, my aim is to destabilize the tendency to take domination as a given fact and instead to analyze those situations of interaction which offer the image of complex and contradictory human interrelations where outcomes are not yet defined.

Frequently, more in everyday reflection than in academic texts, the ways in which positions of power/knowledge are achieved are seen as mysterious. They are taken as a matter of 'pre-cooked' moves, secrets, privileges, and obtained through prearranged strategies. However, it is well known that such secrets, privileges and discreet moves are always embodied in the negotiations of ordinary or extraordinary concerns that are part of the risks or routines of everyday life. Thus, the mystery is not in the existence of secrets but in how these overlap with other expressions of everyday affairs. Hence, an analysis of mechanisms and positions of power which attempts to produce a stable model to explain or reproduce the 'logic' of the social relationships is not useful. Furthermore, to analyze power relationships it is necessary to risk instability and keep a dose of ironic relativism in order to dismantle any fixed scheme of domination, because power neither explains nor establishes the order of things. As Latour has recently argued (1991: 129), 'when actors and points of view are aligned, then we enter a stable definition of society that looks like domination. When actors are unstable and the observers' points of view shift endlessly we are entering a highly unstable and negotiated situation in which domination is not yet exerted'. Thus, power remains as that which has to be explained by the actions of the others (Latour 1986: 265), implying constant variation and an enormous set of combinations.²⁾

Throughout this thesis I have been developing an approach for analyzing the dynamics of power/knowledge relationships which explores the way in which these emerge out of social interactions (see also Long 1992: 27), in this case social interactions in different tomato work contexts. This chapter looks at the dynamics of power/knowledge relationships by exploring their effects. In other words although power is something 'that happens'³⁾, 'it can only be seen through its practice, by focusing on the ways in which techniques are deployed and on the construction of social forces (fluid networks) that give it existence' (see Villarreal forthcoming). However, analysing how power is made by the will of others is always fragmentary and can never be exhaustively explained. This is because power exercises are mostly represented by people's illusions that they are obeyed or by fleeting collective actions where it is not certain who is obeying whom and in which circumstances.

In Chapter II, I analysed the interactions between the researcher and researched, emphasizing how the researcher by detaching her/himself from a

fixed position of privilege, such as that of the 'expert' who seeks to be politically neutral and distant from those involved in the interactive situations (i.e. objective), is nevertheless in a position to make sense of the power differentials and political biases between the researcher and researched and the 'powerful' and 'powerless' in order to come to terms with new forms of political discourse and to resume the questioning of different 'status quos' in working contexts. Chapter III showed how workers reshaped the daily planning of companies, although these eventually complied to different degrees to the productive goals of the company. The ethnographic accounts also showed, in contradiction to an apparently subservient workforce operating within 'disciplined squads', the entrenched ways in which workers promote their own interests, feelings and tactics, taking advantage of some locations and conditions of work, and joking or employing escaping tactics in their everyday work contexts. The prerogative of bosses, managers and farm heads to design schemes and give orders in the tomato fields is diluted by the thousands of initiatives expressed in everyday working circumstances. But resistance does not always take such mild forms, as I show in Chapter IV with the description of how spontaneous rebellions (including a violent one) embracing several groups of workers emerged in protest against working conditions and how these were eventually suffocated. Hence the analysis of worker disobedience and the issue of power in tomato work contexts are not understandable without considering resistance, which is always present and can emerge from anywhere within the power network (Foucault 1981: 95)⁴. Workers 'rebellions' must, in fact, be seen as real threats causing a double effect: On the one hand, the fear of rebellion leads companies to use past experience to justify specific measures of control (e.g. repression, union cooptation or dividing workers and taking precautions against workers attempts to organize themselves) and to extend their political networks among government representatives and politicians; on the other hand, it can lead to companies putting on a progressive (paternalistic) or a stingy face according to the circumstances by making working conditions more flexible or difficult, or by improving, maintaining or cutting salaries and other 'privileges' (e.g. medical care and transportation).

The present chapter is grounded in the follow-up of two situations which Long (1986; 1988; 1989) would characterize as 'social interfaces'⁵. The first is an absent or historical one which is still remembered as present within a specific network of workers. One situation describes how a worker replaced an engineer as head of the greenhouse, reversing the trend of the new management to substitute lay workers by professionals. It describes how the worker won his battle with the boss in specific circumstances, at a time of change when the Rose Company had recently been taken into new ownership. In the aftermath

of this conflictive period, the company was prompted to rearrange the whole organizational schema including the demotion of the man considered locally to be the boss. The second situation emerged during the fieldwork period and called for a more profound exploration of the local effects of technological change. I give an account of the mockery of a second rate but skilled worker who ridiculed the advice given in the field by an international expert on drip irrigation schemes who was training the bosses and professionals of the tomato companies in the advantages of modern technology and how to operate this equipment. This situation was related to me by workers and technicians of the companies involved in the course organized by a national organization of horticulturists.

Through these ethnographic accounts, I examine how certain workers struggle for power and recognition of their positions and authority as both skilfull and knowledgeable workers for making and implementing decisions in respect to different parts of the production process, concerning work one in the greenhouse, the other the maintenance of the drip irrigation system. Different ironic conditions also embody the two cases presented. What is at stake is what is 'normal' or accepted as the 'status quo' (i.e. the substitution of workers by professional engineers or agronomists and the belief that in implementing technical matters experts know more than lay workers). The workers involved in these events were - according to the companies' hierarchical order - neither the best paid, nor considered to have the best qualifications in terms of formal training (i.e. they possessed no certificates or diplomas) nor did the companies regard their departments as the most important for overall decision making in the organization of tomato work.

The chapter focuses on translating what some workers and managers interpreted as workers' power and skill, registered during fleeting moments of fieldwork interaction. These workers were transformed into symbolic 'authorities' not only by their comrades who took them to be the most capable workers in tomato production but also through the acknowledgement of this by the bosses and managers. In this sense workers' power is a social construction developed by the researcher in interacting within specific networks, where accounts of the everyday political struggles of this specific group of workers are 'well known' but where the majority of workers appeared ignorant of what their full implication were. This brings me to look again, as in Chapter II, at how the political elements in the ethnographic analysis have been shaped by the researched. Workers put to me their political views, which can also be taken as projections of what they judged relevant. These views often 'sabotaged' the course of the research forcing me, for example, to take up their challenge of researching in detail the 'old story' of the reinstated worker.

An unexpected political conflict

A worker replacing the agronomist

As a way of breaking the routine, which was proceeding as usual, and while waiting for the next instructions from the boss, two of the workers with whom I had managed to identify, poured out their accumulated resentments, telling me the story of a worker who knew and could do more than the head of the company. "Don't you agree" they asked rhetorically, "that it's justified for workers to ignore senseless orders?".

The question (two months after starting my fieldwork) prompted me to investigate the social networks of the workers involved in the story, which seemed an interesting one that could perhaps give me a more concrete way of presenting the methodological issues involved in researching and analyzing problems. Some workers become more accessible and are more sympathetic to the researcher's job in the field, but this does not necessarily mean that one can always obtain relevant information or maintain permanent access to their networks. The many obstacles to be overcome and the issues to be developed are often tackled as they are presented, in the gaps or in the appropriate free moments in work situations. This was the case as I encountered and tried to find a way to ask the sensitive questions to resuscitate the story. I knew that the question that they had put to me was not entirely an innocent one, and was probably an attempt to draw out my political sympathies. It required an effort to find situations useful for maintaining interaction with them in order to research the events and implications of this story that they considered important for understanding their lifeworlds. The situation the day they asked the question was of the most routine, as nothing out of the ordinary appeared to happen that 8th of November 1987.

The man who had posed the question, Rogelio, continued without waiting for my reply:

'It's just that the office plans don't work,' he said, 'they have to be made in the field. How different things will be the day that students learn through practice and not purely from a distance as they are accustomed to do'.

Alejandro, the other worker seconded him:

'It's like the case that happened three years ago in the greenhouse. Because of Ricardo's unwillingness they dismissed him [he was in charge of this department] and replaced him with an agronomist, a woman, but when she didn't work out they had to bring Ricardo back in order to get the work done,

because only a worker knows what's best in practice'.

The fulfilment of the worker's prophecy

The events related to the company having been taken over by new owners and management. The company was originally owned by a North American who had sold out to a consortium financed from Guadalajara city. A local management team had been appointed to run it, with ideas different to those of the American. The result was disastrous for several reasons.

The new company had had three consecutive catastrophic seasons, which obliged them to place someone else in charge. The financier of the company himself came from the capital to introduce the new manager to the workers and other personnel. This man immediately called for the ex-head of the greenhouse, Ricardo, and asked him to return to his post. When the new manager spoke to Ricardo he told him that he had consulted various people and they had unanimously recommended that for the sake of the company, he should return to his position in the greenhouse. Ricardo recalled how this context had made it easy for him to renegotiate his position:

'I told him that I was interested in the job but the agreement would have to be backed up by the salary and so I asked for the same salary as the agronomist. He accepted my argument with few objections. My argument was that if her work was paid so highly but was in practice of so little use, why was mine, which had been proved for eleven years, not also as highly valued'.

The political nature of the confrontation

"It was a question of political disagreement". In this way and without any circumventions, the reinstalled worker himself related the circumstances surrounding his dismissal:

'When the old 'gringo' owner sold the company to the Mexican associates, they put a relative in charge of the company who was an engineer, but who was very conceited and wanted to impose things that were unacceptable to the workers who knew more than he did. This created a hostile climate which the manager interpreted as undermining his authority in the field. He reacted violently and with a certain amount of irrationality, arguing that the matter was a question of opposition to change. Well, certainly in age and in seniority

in managing the greenhouse I was older than him, and for these reasons he accused me of being corrupt and not wanting to change. His solutions were quite arbitrary. He switched me to another department without any explanation. He humiliated me and reduced my wages.

He continued:

'in the face of such actions I assumed an attitude of silent resistance for dignity or stupidity, who knows? I avoided open confrontation and, with trusted friends, dedicated myself to taking advantage of the fiasco of these little engineers 'made in Mexico'. What made it worth my continuing to work in the company was that the owner who knew of my prevarications, nevertheless dared to reinstate me'.

The agronomist's version: 'the problem arose because I was a woman'

Jeannete, who had graduated from university five years earlier, did not like recalling those difficult times. She summarized them as "details provoked by her being a pioneer". She had thought herself lucky to be one of the first female graduates of the agronomy faculty of the local university. She nonetheless agreed with Ricardo that the conflict was political, though her interpretation of 'political' differed.

It's because people are not used to seeing a woman engineer. And for that reason many of the workers used to complain that things went better when the other worker was in charge of the greenhouse. And they frankly admitted that it was because they did not like being told what to do by a woman, even less so in the field. They were envious of me for it was said that I worked less and earned more. That's why I had problems and had to leave the greenhouse. Also the disasters were not technical, but due to poor years, since the other companies also did not produce much owing to the virus which plagued the region.

Jeanette recognized that when she was put in charge she did not know much, but the boss had insisted that he would give her every support while she was learning the job. She said she did everything the boss had told her to do and had demanded that the workers strictly followed.

Constructing the context I: how the american entrepreneur developed a succesful tomato company

To a degree we can infer that the versions of the political conflict given by the two main protagonists clearly express their differences of class and gender. They are self explanatory and perhaps express different ideological biases, but they cannot offer an exhaustive picture of the situation. To deepen the understanding about the conflict we need to broaden the context. To do so, I provide two kinds of ethnographic accounts, one concerning the origins of the company, the other, that of the two workers' careers. In doing so I am not attempting to give an objective account but to provide insight into the actors' lifeworlds from an actor-oriented analytical perspective, and thereby give a fuller background to and understanding of the conflict.

My approach concurs with Latour's suggestion (1986) of going back in time to rebuild the social origins of power networks that underly interactive situations. This provides reference points from which it is possible to construct the development of the network of power relationships involved. However, in the case of the origins of the company, this was not immediately possible since a key figure for the information I needed to get beyond the impasse of the two versions, was the retired American entrepreneur. The 'gringo', as he was called, became for me the 'grand absentee', who had long been retired and was now living in a tourist's paradise a long way from the region and dedicated to selling property. Twice I went in search of him and it was not easy to motivate this old entrepreneur to retell his story. The first time he was quite resistant, saying he did not want to get involved in problems. "A foreigner like me," he said "can't afford to talk about the government and the country's affairs. It makes one too vulnerable".

But at second meeting, the mention of friends with whom he sympathised, made him more trusting and he related experiences from three interrelated experiences of his life that have a bearing on my story: as a pilot in the American air force during the Second World War; as an ex-tomato entrepreneur expelled from Cuba by Fidel Castro; and as a pioneer of tomato production in the Autlán valley.

The entrepreneur, whom I shall call Jeff, emphasized that despite the risks involved, he had retired economically successful. However, he reminisced that in the field, production is a very inexact science and what gives results one day will be of no use the next. Moreover, with tomatoes what is important is practice, not theory, since if all the technology available was applied in the most ideal way, it could still fail for being too expensive. Jeff recognised that some workers, although earning little, played an important role in success, for they

had the practical experience and were able to think through what was needed in tomato work. But the reason the tomato industry had been such a good business for him was because of the ideal climate and the large number of tomatoes sold on the internal Mexican market. As he explained, "with the Mexican penchant for sauces, something occurs here that happens nowhere else. They commercialize a very high percentage of production".

The innovation of the greenhouse

The greenhouse was an excellent example of Jeffs' contention that the 'ideal' way of setting up technology is not always profitable. He decided to introduce greenhouses because the damage to tender young plants was too high and their replacement too costly. A banking associate in the USA gave him the job of promoting visits around greenhouses and helped him to find technicians to install them in Mexico. Yet he became very frustrated by the work of these technicians. 'They were so inflexible and wanted to do everything as it was done in Florida. This did not work at all and the solution we arrived at was to combine some of the things done in the USA with what local workers could do in practice'. In Mexico, he commented, 'they have neither money, nor sufficient resources to install sophisticated electronic equipment and we had to make changes as we went along because it was very expensive to bring everything from the United States'.

The company's system of work

Jeff explained that many of the military concepts that he had learned in the air force were useful to him in organizing his company. A basic requirement was knowing how to select the right people for the job in question. He claimed:

It was not necessary to have trained and highly paid people for everything. What one needs to do is train new people who have no established work habits. Sometimes it is constraining to work with test pilots because it is difficult to get them to drop old habits and they can't adapt to flying new planes.

Another idea was to establish planning teams for the work:

One is playing with capital every day and with essential resources for the livelihood of thousands of people who think differently. In the air squadron,

it was necessary to find constant forms of communication with the lieutenant to plan and determine exactly the situations on the different battle fronts. In the company we adopted a system of having meetings each day with the ten farmheads before beginning work. They had the right to protest to the point of grumbling at me, but once they agreed on what had to be done, everyone disciplined themselves to that end.

Constructing the context II: the two careers

Ricardo: the local assistant

What is notable about Ricardo is that, although he has never set foot inside a university, yet his skills and knowledge are generally acknowledged - a fact reflected in his nickname - 'the prof' or 'the doctor'. He successfully completed secondary education despite the poverty of his family, which was accentuated by its large number (17 of them). With such poor economic means, it would have been difficult for him to continue his education beyond primary level if it had not been for one of his teachers who, recognizing his ability, invited him to give classes to pupils who were behind in their education. In referring to those years, Ricardo said he didn't earn much, but it was useful experience and he was able to continue his schooling. But this was only for five years and then he had to stop because he became seriously ill.

The naturist

At 22 years of age Ricardo appeared to be dying. Medical specialists were unable to diagnose his illness, and conventional medicine declared him beyond help. His parents put what little they had at his disposal and tried every kind of treatment - witchcraft, cleansings, herbs and celebrated doctors, but all to no avail. Ricardo told me "all hope had been lost and those great doctors dared to prophecy that I had three days to live". Without much hope of success they turned as a last hope to a 'Doctor' Daniel, a man who practised naturist and homeopathic medicine in El Grullo.⁶ Dr. Daniel, after making a diagnosis from an examination of the iris, gave Ricardo confidence by assuring him that, despite his frailty, his body was not as diseased as it seemed and he believed he would react favourably to treatment. For three months he followed a disciplined programme based on hydrotherapy, infusions, drinks and a strict diet. And he returned to normal.

As Dr. Daniel noticed that he was interested in natural medicines, he

invited him to study and train as a naturist instructor. He worked with this doctor for many years. He recalled:

I liked the idea that medicine was there to serve, and should not be used to make a business out of health. He personally enjoyed giving me lessons and sent me off to research the reactions and natural treatments that existed in different regions such as the Sierra and Coast. Dr. Daniel also wanted me to collect plants and tea recipes and other therapeutic treatments that were practised locally. Through daily contact with Dr. Daniel I acquired the habit of making notes, case by case, as I monitored the reactions of the patient. By an irony of life, on the death of Dr. Daniel the centre was appropriated by one of his followers who became a medical 'merchant' and I felt out of place and left.

The experienced worker

Ricardo began his work for the tomato company as a *peon*. With time, and because of ability, he was made overseer of a group of workers. From there he was promoted to the greenhouse, where he learned a great deal from German instructors who the company brought in from the United States to train fifteen workers selected by the company. He followed them closely over the short two-month period of the course, and he pursued them with relentless questions. Ricardo was the only one of the fifteen to complete the course successfully, and proudly said that he kept the notes he had made of what the instructors had said. Ricardo has retained this habit of making daily notes and records of what happens in the greenhouse and what the plants need. He considers that the autonomy enjoyed in his department was won during the time of the 'gringo', and after various conflicts. Ricardo illustrated this with an example:

... it was about applying fungicide, and the 'gringo' told me to apply the stuff without giving me clear instructions or informing me of the contents. So I decided not to apply it. He was very annoyed. On seeing his annoyance I answered that he should take the trouble to explain its purpose since I was not going to risk my work by committing an error. Even more annoyed, Jeff answered that if he demanded something should be done, then it was because he would assume the responsibility. I repeated more strongly that as the person responsible, if the application resulted in a mistake, then he was going to throw the blame on me. This just enraged him further to the extent that I recall that it was he who gave me the cheque (who pay the salary). Me too - angered - told him that he could not buy me, and that the moment he wanted, the job was free. In the end the gringo ended up apologizing.

Because, as *patron*, he acknowledged that we gave him a lot so he could make money he respected that.

Ricardo had a good understanding with the new boss, who had reinstated him, especially since he let him do things in his own way. What Ricardo understood by 'his way' included the custom inherited from his father of sowing during days when the moon was at it height and employing his preference for the natural treatment of plants, thus avoiding the excessive use of herbicides and fungicides. He liked to spread rumours about their contaminating effects and their unnecessary use.

The trusted secretary: the career of Jeannete

On finishing her preparatory studies, Jeanette was invited to work for this same gringo, Jeff, who lived opposite her house. He invited her because he knew she spoke English. Jeannete's mother managed to negotiate, as a condition of her contract, combining the work with the chance to go to university and finish her professional studies. Jeannete began in the office and was put in charge of the English newsletters sent each month to the other American associates. She also made up the payroll, prepared the bank accounts, and did the correspondence and all the paper work for the company. It was heavy work and she suffered from the load, especially when her university work load was also demanding.

The engineer

On graduating in agronomy Jeannete continued with the company, working for the new owners. She enjoyed the fact that they gave her trusted work, such as responsibility for fertilizing, for tracking down viruses and, for what she considered the most important, avoiding economic wastage on salaries for people who did not work hard. She also liked to consult with the boss frequently and review all the responsibilities of the outdoor work. She admitted that the boss treated her as a confidante and told her all his problems. She preferred the boss to comment on or read for her all the pamphlets of the commercial houses on pesticides and technology as she "didn't like big books". The disaster in the greenhouse had been put firmly behind her in the sense that she felt that at the end of the day she had come out of it well. The space she was allowed in her professional work was greater than that of many of those who had sought to destroy her. In her opinion in salary and knowledge she had

left them behind, outstripped them, because she was better, continued to progress, and had gained the trust of the boss.

Jeannette admitted, however, that she had also learned a lot from workers who were keen and always questioning her about things. But she considered them to be a minority. The majority needed to be ordered to do things because they were not interested in learning or understanding the details of the technological changes taking place. What some workers especially refused to do was apply chemicals, an aspect that had changed considerably since the time of the gringo. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the land did not require so many pesticides in those days.

For Jeannette, this problem would resolve itself once the drip irrigation system was introduced which would make cheating impossible. The proper dosage of whatever was to be applied would simply be put in the irrigation tanks and no-one could interfere with this. Although in reality there is yet little known about the side effects of pesticides, and very little progress has been made in effective biological control, Jeannette saw existing pest and weed control as advanced and safe. The common procedure followed by the company for pesticides was to apply them when disease was diagnosed, and then economic considerations were primary and what types they had in store. When their own efforts did not result in control, they sought help from outside, usually from the commercial houses. She considered this to be a beneficial relation for the company, where one could obtain information about recent technological advances and their application, although she was aware that their aims of course were to sell. Her executive approach to her work has entailed a loss of anonymity something that pains her. Men refer to her, no matter where, as 'the engineer'. But she is proud of her new and powerful motor vehicle, to which she has added a feminine touch, keeping it clean and sweet smelling, with special carpets.

'Worker power' and the changing context of the company

I now wish to develop different interpretations of the conflict and elaborate in how it reflects the transformations occurring in the politics of tomato work. I first examine the significance of this worker's power, reflecting on analytical utility of the concept of social interface (Long 1989). Once the researcher reaches the point of becoming immersed in the ongoing flux of power relationships, it is possible to move between and through both sides of the interface situation. At this juncture actors' arguments - no matter how fragmentary or outdated in character - become meaningful and help one to

interconnect the events which point to the associations of people involved in different networks, often revealing apparently incompatible lifeworlds.

The nature of the conflict between the two employees and the manager was readily acknowledged by all three parties as political and explicitly linked to matters concerning company authority. But concretely they talked about it in terms of the implementing of greenhouse organization. However, their interpretations about how and why the conflict emerged, differed. This raises the interesting question of how common ground and the interlocking of ideological representations takes place, whilst at the same time effectively concealing the multifarious and divergent interests of the actors concerned. The analytical challenge, then, is twofold. We need, on the one hand, to understand how these representations interrelate despite their confrontational character; and, on the other, having come to grips with this interlocking process, we have to pose the issue of whether it is possible to avoid the 'dissolution' of actors after the conflicts have taken place, since, the fleeting moments in which they (managers, foremen, workers etc) exert or lack power become 'subordinated' conceptually to some notion of the continuing networks of power manifested through the controls and authority that the company essentially commands.

The deposed agronomist approached the situation with a specific gender focus. Her argument was not an abstract discussion about women's rights such as in the case of some feminist discourses, but a pragmatic and ideological one which assumes from the outset the difficulties for the professional woman pioneer who wants to promote her interests in a successful professional career. She used techniques such as working closely with the boss and gaining his trust, supporting technological change and progress, and favouring the commercial interests of the company in compliance with the *patron's* mandate to override the unwillingness of workers who disliked being ordered about in the tomato fields by a woman. She did not assess the outcome of the conflict as a political defeat. By sharing the interpretation of the boss, she thought of the conflict as a bad moment, and looked upon it not as failure but as a general technical hitch or virus which had affected all other companies in the region. In this way, the conflict was seen as an event in her career which formed part of a learning process within the company, and it prompted her to leave behind many of those who had sought to destroy her politically. She eventually expressed more awareness about managing workers and the possibility of learning from subordinates willing to cooperate.

The reinstated worker and his fellow workers focused the conflict around a specific class argument. For him, the conflict was an outcome of a disagreement with the *patron* and was provoked by the 'arbitrary' behaviour of the boss who humiliated him and reduced his salary. He opted for a political

tactic, avoiding open confrontation by silent and subversive resistance to the situation. He used also the technique of spreading rumours and gossip through close friends. Gradually but surely he built an oppositional network among the workers of the greenhouse, gradually able to express criticisms more openly when the situation of the continuing harvest failures presented themselves. After negotiating better working conditions, he continued to be independent in the management of the greenhouse but this circumstance served to distance him from the close group of decision makers of the company, in which the deposed agronomist remained. Hence, although his reinstatement represented an acknowledgment of the capability and contribution of workers, it may also provoked a resentment in the mind of the boss who was reluctant to include in everyday discussions and planning practices those difficult or rebellious workers such as Ricardo. This in fact, can be interpreted as a mechanism used by the company to stop him from rising to other company positions or obtaining privileges.

The boss focused upon the conflict in terms of reestablishing discipline within the company and attempting a normative solution which eventually was unsuccessful. Although he tried to disqualify those who confronted him, for being opposed to change and corrupt, this was not enough to stop workers disobeying his instructions in the greenhouse and undermining his authority in the company. Facing the failures and consequent political risks, his successor abandoned disciplinary measures against the worker but at the same time encouraged the close group of decision makers, continued to reinforce the use of technical language and the appointment of professionals and supported their training. He promoted the idea that the conflict was due to a virus, and that it was a technical matter common to the region. In this way, the *virosis* was a fortuitous and potentially unquestionable pretext, a sort of natural disaster and external cause, that could easily allow any political mistakes of mismanagement to be forgiven. After three years, the majority of workers (local and migrant) had no idea about the conflict and for the close group concerned with daily planning, - all of whom were aware of the conflictive situation -, it was a question of the past which concerned only the greenhouse.

The accounts of the conflict are useful not only because they highlight how, during fleeting moments, some workers become powerful, but above all because they throw light on how the management of power networks passes through different hands. Political concerns and feelings about power issues are continually expressed in ordinary as well as extraordinary situations and are open to multiple interpretations. The 'historical trend' of replacing workers by agronomists or engineers - momentarily contested - did not stop, but underneath, the ways of securing power differentials, which is more

complicated than creating positions for professionals or lay workers, continued. Although the conflict entailed a discontinuity in work organization it did not lead to a definitive change. The destabilization of working relations that occurred is useful in the analysis not because this represents an historical watershed but because it reflects interlocking points⁷ in the sequence of everyday life and is thus useful 'to understand what it is that stabilises social relations to generate power effects' (see Law 1991: 166).

Underlying the conflict was a shift in the style of management due to the change in ownership to which workers in particular make reference. These workers regard the shift as a drastic rupture because afterwards, (see annex 2 which offers a diagrammatic explanation of this shift) at least ten of these workers who were normally involved in planning meetings - as described by the American entrepreneur - were discharged from the close group involved in daily planning. What they had seen as a 'democratic style', had suddenly disappeared. Although some workers such as Rogelio criticized this democratic style as a tactic for obtaining gratis the best ideas of workers, later - he thought - it had been brought in by the gringo to motivate them and eventually to ease the control of workers. Whatever the truth, the workers noticed the difference immediately and interpreted it as a sign of a more centralized and authoritarian style of management being implemented by the new owners of the company. The farm and department heads talking with the boss in a frank atmosphere was now substituted by a group of four which included the deposed agronomist, the head of personnel (another experienced worker), the accountant of the company and the local manager. From then on workers had to get used to receiving daily work instructions from this group.

On workers' power

As an effect of reinstating Ricardo an idealtypical image emerged of the power of workers 'who knew more and had destroyed the authority of the head of the company'. But, although it might affirm that workers can preserve their autonomy and exert authority and control certain spheres within the company, - 'where only the worker knows what is best in practice' -, this did not imply any change in the company towards worker self-management or in managerial decision-making. In fact, from the point of view of the managers, such as the deposed agronomist and the new local boss, the image of workers' power evaporated quickly once the worker was reinstated. At the end of the day they reassumed control, and later considered that they had thus gained in authority.

The reinstated worker regained and continued to enjoy what he calls

'autonomy' in the greenhouse. This enjoyment of autonomy is what is implied in the notion of autonomy offered by Gorz (1980) when he talks of the uncaptured effort that all human work comprises and which is defended by the worker as a sovereign praxis. In this case, the conflict implied power of two kinds 'power to' (negotiate his salary and manage the greenhouse in his own way) and 'power over' (the capacity to influence and enrol people and control). Hence, for fleeting moments the worker exerted 'power discretion' and after receiving unanimous support to return as head of the greenhouse, he acted with authority in the name and interests of the company.

Although concentrated in specific networks, circumstances and spaces, the matter of workers' power concerns and eventually influences the course of events of the whole tomato production process. Never mind that this can be judged as functional to the interests of the company, - akin to capitalizing the efforts of workers -, since, as the old gringo recognized, 'workers play an important role in the success of the company; they earn so little but are skilful when it comes to understanding tomato work'.

Last but not least the image of workers' power, - of some workers as champions or having authority -, may convey a picture of ironic revenge as it contradicts the view of workers being submissive and obliged to obey the instructions of a boss who rests his authority on prerogative and not on the viability and coherence of his instructions. It may also be used as an ideological argument for promoting the 'school of life' rather than academic approach to the acquisition of knowledge and its use in designing work plans. Indeed workers express an awareness of the mistakes of managers and technicians and know the limitations of controlling everything from the office.

Worker skills and the local effects of 'transferring' technology

The second ethnographic account continues with this analysis of the effects of power/knowledge and is interconnected in many ways with the previous case. Some of the participants are the same, though the context and script is different. The account stresses how the process of 'transferring' technology provokes a multiplicity of local effects and transformation of meanings in the interactions analyzed. Concretely, the situation demonstrates the continuous efforts of the tomato companies to work more efficiently and to reinforce the training of their professionals.

Chimino's mockery of the Israeli expert

Thursday the 7th October 1988 was a celebratory day for the Producers Association of Autlán.⁸ It was the day that the month's course on drip irrigation, given by a team of Israeli experts, headed by the Director of Experimental Plant Genetics of the Neissman Institute, ended.⁹ The Professor had demonstrated that the drip irrigation equipment of the region was not operating at its full potential and he claimed that this was because it was badly designed, or more likely, poorly operated by the technician or workers in charge (see annex 3, regional information newspaper no 481, Oct. 1988: 7).

Of course, the newspaper account made no mention of the bad time given Professor Abi by Chimino, a worker responsible for operating some of this 'inefficient' irrigation equipment, who mocked his attempt to make a field test to corroborate his claim. Two days after the event I heard several versions of this mockery, both from participants of the course and from one of the other researchers of the team who was present. This prompted me to follow the sequence of events and contact Chimino himself.

This is the story he told me during pauses in routine maintenance work on company irrigation equipment. He began:

"There were several rare things that day. Many people arrived very early at the 'airport' ranch, including the boss and my superior, Engineer Jeannete, who was also attending the course. I noted that they came prepared: they brought cameras, calculators and even maps of the area. I did not count them all but there were at least 25 and they were making notes and all that. It was said that there were some extensionists working for *Banrural*, from Baja California, and a tall and thin foreigner whom they referred to as Pieter [the engineer from our project]. The Israeli Professor approached me and said: look, get the equipment working and then he started with his bla.. bla.. and a rallying call "let's proceed", as he tried to get the attention of the students. Here he paused and asked me in a low voice "What are you going to do? What are you going to do?" and I told him I was first going to drain and clean the well. Again he shouted so the students would hear and said "we are draining the water from the well. Go on, go on", he insisted.

Now I interrupted here and said I was going to start with the water and warned him that I was only going to use 600 gallons, and that this was the usual quota here since there were only seven valves to distribute the water to the sections of the equipment. The Professor continued to watch the pressure gauge. As he observed that the pressure level was not as he expected he began to shout louder and gesticulate for more pressure! I opposed him: it's just that I have only seven valves through which I can deposit that much water. But he appeared not to listen to what I was telling him and continued

to call me to give more pressure, saying didn't I see that the gauge should register more pressure. For a few moments I gave more pressure, but only so that he could see that the equipment had indeed the capacity, then I stopped because if I had continued I was going to cause damage to the most distant sections, where certainly tubes and fag ends of the sprinklers would burst with the excess pressure.

When the Professor again noticed that I had lowered the pressure he was annoyed and began to shout louder. And it was then when the agitated discussion started. He told the students 'Look! Look!' and he pointed to one of the pressure gauges which oscillated quickly and was not functioning well and for that reason was not giving the correct pressure. I again contradicted him: no, it is giving me the pressure that I want it to give. He was even more annoyed and said let's see the pressure of the other gauge and according to him, it corroborated his point of view. He called the students again, 'look carefully! this gauge has little exit pressure'. I again contradicted him, telling him this was what I wanted, that the stream stayed small so that it might fall to the foot of the plant. But he continued to insist on more pressure, and I went on contradicting him saying I was sure neither he nor the others would repair the burst pipes and hoses destroyed in the distant sections. As he could neither make me shut up nor convince me, he seemed to leave me a little in peace. He took his calculator and went with the group of students to verify his calculations and then finally repeated his conclusion that the equipment was badly designed and was not operated well.

Chimino interpreted this as a personal insult and reacted angrily when he heard the Professor say to the students "it's just that they need to recycle the water, cleaning the containers of the system every five minutes"¹⁰. On hearing this Chimino contradicted him, and said because of the condition of the wells it was only necessary to recycle and clean twice a day and that he could not understand how one managed to irrigate if one was recycling and cleaning every moment. As the Professor returned to his point about measuring more pressure, it occurred to Chimino to make a bet with him to see who was right about what happened at the extremes of the equipment. In his own words, these were the terms of his bet.

You say that with the pressure I am using we have a medium stream on leaving the equipment but little and insufficient on arriving at the plants, but I say that you are wrong. I am using a stream of water smaller than you ask but I assure you that it is big enough and gives sufficient water to arrive at the plants, because you have not taken account of the fact that the terrain has a gradient towards both extremes. I invite you to go and verify who is right. We then went to see and when we arrived he remained dumb and surprised.

On returning to the pump house, the Professor again wanted to insist that the equipment was in every way badly designed and no use, and that the equipment presented in the course which they were offering for sale to the companies had no problems. The Professor tried to challenge Chimino by asking how much the equipment had cost. Chimino turned to his boss to answer the question and he told them that it cost 1,200 dollars per hectare. The Professor replied immediately addressing himself to the students: 'you see so much money thrown in the street because the equipment is no use and this fellow who doesn't know how to irrigate as he ought!'.

Taking this as a further insult, Chimino again interrupted and shouted to him that he had demonstrated that the equipment worked and that all he wanted to do was sell his machinery. "I told him clearly that that was what he came for, and that was another matter, and if he had been open about it he would have avoided insulting people. Chimino asked the Professor: "How about if I give you a blow with a bottle to your head". The Professor was again annoyed and replied that although he was old he could defend himself. Then Chimino laughingly told him, that he had reacted like any one else to insults. "I did not wish to offend you", he said " but this is what happened, You arrived wanting to sell fine shoes when you see someone with broken sneakers. Because it's so much bla-bla... If what you want is to sell, then offer your product, and do not say that a person is no use and does not know how to irrigate".

Constructing the context III

Before moving to the discussion let me first present Chimino's background and part of the speech given by the President of the National Union of Horticulturalists at the closing ceremony of the course, which provides a useful link with the earlier case. I also add interpretations of other participants whom I asked to evaluate the course and what it signified for the tomato companies.

Chimino's background

Chimino is one of the more unusual members of the company and easily identifiable. He was presented to me as 'crazy, who smiles and talks a lot, and the one responsible for the irrigation equipment', and at the same time as 'the fearless worker, intelligent and much sought after'.

He was one of thirteen siblings and still young, having scarcely reached thirty. He had had to interrupt his studies prematurely and work to help his

mother maintain the family when the father abandoned them. Perhaps that is why he liked to repeat that he could just about sign his name and did not know how to write, although recently, under pressure from the company, he had begun to do so and was even using a calculator to get the correct mixture of fertilizer and pesticides in the application pumps. He intends to attend night school for adults, in order, as he says, to do something better than 'dog's work'. His way of presenting himself is completely informal. Small in stature, he likes to dress in a strange way for the environment he lives in, in clothes bought in the USA. He had lived there in a negro quarter and had had tattoos put on both arms, to help him identify with the *cholos* of the *barrio*. However, Chimino is also an experienced and responsible worker, who has managed to rise to several positions in the company which has helped him economically. He is proud to own his own house. His boss respects his adaptability and readiness to learn new things. In this respect, while still only a boy who knew nothing, he had set himself to driving tractors, and he had dared to install the irrigation equipment for the company on the basis of the provisional plans provided by the American salesman, who, overwhelmed by the enormous demand for the installation of equipment in the region, had left others to install it. This made him an important worker for the company who was able to use the majestic language of 'let's do', or 'let's plant'. He defended the working of the dam, is inventive and adaptive in maintaining the equipment at least cost.

Despite his loquacity he is very sure of himself, accepts being put down by no-one, and knows how to wait for the right moment to suggest a raise in salary, since he "would not like them then to pay him with bad grace". On the other hand, he glories in driving the company's most delapidated vehicle, because he is "not interested in a new one as a substitute for a better salary"; finally, as the worker who boasts 'the best calculations are those that you have to make when your life is at stake, as happened to me when I had to jump with my motorbike over a car which was about to knock me down'.

The closing ceremony of the course

Jeannete looked very elegant and more nervous than usual for her presentation at the close of the course. She was part of the group chosen as being the most advanced by the Israelies to present a design of the ideal equipment, based on the calculations of the terrain and available equipment. The instructors introduced and supported the presenters, requesting that they use the technical terms learned, and helping them to clarify confusing points. It fell to Jeannete to discuss the cost of equipment. She came to the conclusion that it cost 2,890

dollars a hectares, an amount that seemed too high to two of the owners who were present who asked about forms of financing and repayment. At this point, the Israeli Professor intervened and said that the costs would reduce in the medium term because the equipment would last a long time and in five years they would scarcely need to do anything other than replace the hosepipes. The rest would be intact.

The star moment of the course came with the final words of the representative and General Director of the (UNPH) Union of Horticultural Producers, the institution which sponsored the occasion, the second of its kind to be held in Mexico. The theme he pursued was that of endowing the associates with the knowledge of new technological developments. He began by underlining the efforts of the UNPH to find the best technology, wherever that might be, Japan, Holland, Spain or Israel. For him, it had been the Israelies who had supported the UNPH. They were still in the vanguard of agricultural production and technological knowledge and so it was not coincidental that they were so advanced in drip irrigation.

After congratulating the local association for daring to organize the course which demonstrated their desire for progress, he prophesied that in the near future they would resolve the irrationality that the inefficient management of costly investments of the irrigation equipment represented. He gave an example to illustrate what this error meant:

"it is like buying an airplane without a qualified pilot. The simple *mayordomos* are not yet responding to qualified and technical management. It is with facts like this that the UNPH is seeking to place itself at the top and respond to the challenges of modernization and competition. Only in this way will it be possible to overcome the irrationality presented by the fact that, for a market as important as that of the USA, countries as distant as Chile, Holland and Israel are beating Mexico."

To conclude, he declared that the key explanation of such irrationality was that the planning of the tomato companies continued to be based on fundamental weaknesses: the economic advantages of cheap labour and the low value of the Mexican *peso* over other currencies. In the future cheap labour and a devalued *peso* would be insufficient and it would necessary to master new technology and face the challenges of modernization in order to be more productive and avoid the continued loss of position in the market. With the step taken that night, he said, he was convinced better technical management would be assured which could serve them to achieve efficiency in vegetable production.

Analyzing the situation

The effect of an 'official' truth

Putting on the course and the language used in the closure conveyed the idea that the tomato companies and other producers represent not only the interests of the region but that they are to some extent the heralds of a strategy to recover their market position (especially that of the United States) vis-à-vis countries like Chile, Holland and Israel. This argument is continually used by companies in their struggle for legitimacy and relevance in local political contexts. The course itself was presented as demonstrating that the region was progressing and reaching its goals of increasing production. Transfer of modern technology was viewed a guarantee of success since new equipment would guarantee the control of plant disease through the regular application of pesticides and fertilizers, and help in achieving better positions in the market.

This all fitted with the celebratory atmosphere in which arguments such as that of the Israeli Professor concerning the poor design and operation of the irrigation equipment and the irrationalities denounced by the national representative of the UNPH became dogmas used to explain past or present outcomes and to project perspectives for the region in the tomato industry. This was the main argument and public image communicated in the local media which suggested that in order to compete and reach a good position in the market companies had to master imported new technologies and abandon the weaknesses inherent in using cheap labour and the financial 'tricks' or benefits of constant devaluation of the Mexican *peso*. Underlying this argument is the accusation about equipment from unscrupulous designers and of the use of non-expert operators on sophisticated and expensive equipment seen as a thing of the past and equated with using unqualified pilots to fly costly airplanes - the opposite argument to that of the American entrepreneur who saw experts as less flexible to new ideas and the success of his company as due precisely to the factors condemned by the man from the UNHP.

Workers such as Chimino do not have a voice in this 'official' version, rather they are considered as outside the logic. It is not surprising therefore that the verbal confrontation of the expert with Chimino was ignored as irrelevant, - a visible effect of the power/knowledge differences of specific networks -. I was curious to know the reactions of the participants in the course to this confrontation. I talked informally with twelve of them during and after the closing ceremony and discovered that only two of them had actually noticed anything perplexing in what they had witnessed - others had simply thought 'what a stubborn worker'. The comments of the two who had thought the

altercation highlighted certain problems are interesting.

One was a Mexican chemist. He was teaching soil analysis on the course. To him the course represented an 'objective advance' for the region, though he was not very optimistic about any immediate benefits, nor thought that there would be any dissent from the 'official version'. The course, he assessed another step in the process of 'socializing' knowledge; in the present context of change, the companies were in fact reaching out to international experts. In the past, foreigners had left no room in their teaching for local initiative, to the point of dictating where one should place one's feet in the greenhouse, and the bosses themselves did not know the content of such courses. He recognized that the visits of companies to tomato farms in the United States, Spain, Holland and Israel were fruitful for organizing tomato production more efficiently. He interpreted the altercation between Chimino and the Israeli as the struggle between expert and practical knowledge and as an expression of different ways of assessing and diagnosing the situation. For him, scientists and technicians are more insecure than lay people and peasants, proceeding as they do from a theoretical position derived from some notion of scientific knowledge. They are accustomed to checking everything with 'exact' methods and mathematical calculations. Peasants and lay people, on the contrary, address problems as they do because the issue for them relates to making a living practically.

The other participant who expressed his awareness of the altercation, and who referred to it in the closing ceremony, was an engineer working for a government institution and one of the more able students. He said that Chimino put in question for him all the teachings of the expert. Chimino was surely right since he obviously had sound practical knowledge even though he might not give you a technical explanation should you ask him.

On workers' skills

To understand how the image of a skillful worker is created and maintained, it is not only necessary to look at individual achievements and life histories but to examine how these connect up with and are reshaped by specific social processes, i.e. how they make sense in different situations and are seen as relevant, or representing the best performance or abilities in tomato work. What some workers interpreted as the stereotypical 'democratic dream' of the era of the American, of images of skillful workers emerging within an environment characterized by competition and promotion for those who identified with and effectively participated in the company's progress, others saw as a time in which cheap but skilled workers were appreciated and promoted, without

favouritism or impositions by the boss. The criteria of skillful then depended upon the ready acceptance in particular departments of the company of the most 'qualified' workers. With the changes, characterized by a more centralized style, a different profile for selecting candidates was projected, which appeared to rest on the favouritism of the boss and his close group of decision makers for workers who were considered more loyal, sympathetic or who shared their interests and could fulfill certain tasks. However, some workers still held to the idea that some workers are generally acknowledged as meriting promotion, or remain on the imagined list (whether in the head of the bosses or workers) of the most skillful. Chimino seemed to be one of these.

Anyway, the meaning of what is a skillful worker is a question of interpretation. In the case of Chimino the boss appreciated him for his adaptability and readiness to learn new things, which pretty well coincided with Chimino's own view that being more capable and skillful was a question of attitude and being open to opportunities. Being skillful meant being able to negotiate a good salary and working conditions, given with grace and avoiding 'dog's work'. Some among his colleagues identify his skill as part of his boldness - the adventurer - able to do any job. In practice, to be skillful is to be able to solve problems, manage scarce resources, test things out, invent, adapt etc, and this also means being more productive for the company without expecting great rewards. Of course, Chimino's life circumstances and the environment in which he grew up are part of the process of socialization influencing his attitude to developing skills. Obligated as a teenager to face the rigours of life, due to the father's desertion of the family, he became engaged in a career or style of life full of challenges and adventures. His different experiences predisposed him to face challenges and learn from them. It was not strange therefore for Chimino to be aware that his attitude towards the expert was challenging. He is very confident of his practical ability and knowledge as well and feelings for the equipment which is something to be defended as a son, since it represents for him one of the most noticeable achievements in his career. Having a precise awareness of local conditions and the necessary skills, meant that he was able to adapt and install the equipment bought from the American salesman that the latter himself was unable to undertake. It gave him the security of knowing he was more able than the normal worker, and a position from which to challenge the arrogance of the international expert.

But although being skillful represents a distinction for a worker and might give him privileges and positions within the company, as the ethnographic account shows, it does not automatically determine visible power/knowledge effects. For instance Chimino neither replaced his superior, Jeannete, for winning the bet with the expert, nor did or would the success with his own

equipment have qualified him to become a contractor for installing new irrigation equipment, at least for the time being.

Criticism from below: technology commercially camouflaged and the course as brainwashing to increase or defend privileges

This situation offers an opportunity to point to the use of irony as a critical perspective. The issue of a 'second rate' worker winning the bet with an international expert precisely in his field of competence at a time when he was acting as the most prestigious and acknowledged expert is an ironic one which indeed leads us to comment on some of the epistemological and political implications of this situation. Maybe it is true that Chimino cannot explain anything using accepted technical language, but neither does the ignorance of the altercation by the majority of the course participants add any objective disqualification for denying Chimino's practical knowledge. In fact, what is at stake is the way 'scientific value' is attributed to things and people's actions and how this influences the maintenance and reshaping of specific power/knowledge networks. Because scientific value is given a high profile the practical knowledge and skills of workers are undervalued. The confrontation in the field, however, helped to relativize both kinds of knowledge and showed how they are circumscribed by different analytical arenas and address themselves to different audiences. The routine and recommendations of the expert were inappropriate and appeared wrong for the local conditions of the particular farm in which the expert tried to test his thesis. But the recommendations of the expert, nevertheless became the 'official truth' and the validity of what the worker had to say from his own knowledge and practice were ignored or relegated to a minor place in training and the media because they were not scientific and not expressed in the language of mathematical calculation. Yet one cannot hide the fact that the local tuning of the worker's skills in the application implementing of technical procedures questions such an 'official truth', even when only a few people, including the researcher, develops such a critical argument.

This point leads us to reflect on the epistemological and political implications of such situations. How, for example, can one come to terms with and freely detach epistemological and political criteria from the different kinds of 'official' and 'institutional truths' ruling in different contexts and under specific circumstances. It is at this edge that an actor-oriented perspective and the concept of interface shows its analytical strength. i.e. the researcher by following actors and their actions can bring to the analysis an understanding of

social processes that often appear diluted in the fleeting moments of interaction. It is often the case that critical dimensions are expressed by the absent, the less visible, or by forms of localized resistance embodied in things or people that are somehow 'disqualified' or characterized as outside 'the logic'. If the researcher can bring to her/his analysis this 'absent character', then we are better able to grasp the dynamic circumstances of everyday life.

The criticisms expressed by Chimino were direct and radical. He identified the course in general as unsatisfactory because he thought a knowledge of expensive equipment was less useful if it did not take into account the needs and possibilities of the terrain, and he pointed out that even the bosses complained about the cost of the equipment offered. He questioned the ability and motives of the people who had received the training - referring to his superior, Jeannette - because he thought she would be unable to work such equipment. He saw the course as a sort of 'brainwashing to increase privileges'. He plainly believed that Jeannette has nothing to teach him about how to irrigate. Nevertheless, Chimino's resistance moulds the style of intervention of his superior and the way authority and control are exercised. Chimino predicts more changes in work organization as an outcome of the course, especially in recycling the water which will signify more work for the worker. He is clear in his opinion that the intention of transferring technology is a commercial strategy. On this last point, Chimino managed, in his own 'language' - threatening a blow to the head with a bottle - to unmask the insults thrown at him and the hidden agenda of the expert whose tactics are aimed at selling new equipment. Indeed the commercial interests revealed themselves more explicitly in the students' presentations at the closing ceremony.

Chimino's observation that there are other motives behind training coincides with the critical argument of Long and Villarreal (1993), that knowledge processes are more dynamic and problematic, involving as they do the transformation of meanings nor simple a transfer of ideas or technology from one individual or social unit to another. Moreover knowledge and technology are informed by specific ideological biases representing concrete struggles and negotiations aimed at advancing business, political and personal interests. And finally, as the American entrepreneur emphasized, there is not in fact one external model of exact science or technology to apply in the field, but thousands of adaptations and contributions of different participants in the productive process, not least the skills of the workers whose performance can make still big difference in the profitability of tomato production. Thus, there is no pure science and technology but only artifacts in the hands of actors trying to advance their individual interests through the enrolment of clients, pupils and allies.

For Chimino the course on irrigation is more appropriately seen as a way of advancing the careers in the company for those like Jeannete. He also thinks that the course puts into her hands more information which will be useful for her to control him and through her 'calculations' exert more pressure for the application of pesticides. This brings us to a last reflection on the role of calculation or mathematics and the all-encompassing perspective which defines the character of being a scientist or technician. Alongside this, there is the ideology and discourse emphasizing the need to modernize and automatize the productive process, which attempts to picture entrepreneurs and managers as promoters, good friends or masters of science and technology. According to this logic, sophisticated language, credentials and titles became prerequisites for scaling company hierarchies and widening the gap between workers and managers. Gorz, argues elsewhere (1980: 172) that calculus, information and language which are used to underline superiority and difference of level (including salary and prerogatives), are of little or no practical use in the working situation. Interviewing French workers, he confirms that these constitute a sort of cultural symbolism that have nothing to do with the solution of the practical problems of production. Indeed the 'all-encompassing perspective' argued as distinctive of managers is attributable to experienced workers who exert it without attending special courses or training.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown how analysing social situations and focusing upon the effects of power/knowledge played out there helps to understand the complex and frequently contradictory human interrelations involved in the everyday politics of tomato work. I also showed how the changing face of power, although fragmentarily registered, can be analyzed without the need to start from any fixed schema of domination, and without waiting for the complete transformation of the so-called political system.

Several discontinuities shaped the history of the Rose Company, such as changes in ownership, political conflict, production failures, the style of organization and changes in senior and intermediate positions. These discontinuities in fact represent visible ruptures which were physically, spatially and temporally expressed in many interconnected social forms.

This brings to the fore the importance of developing a theoretical strategy which allows us to build, what I called in Chapter I, 'a local theory' based on the analysis of the interlocking nature of social interactions and events. This means that events, such as the training course, artifacts such as technology and

the knowledge involved in its implementation, but above all the action of the intervening actors - their power and skills - become the interlocking points that allow us to talk about apparently incompatible but interrelated lifeworlds and to understand what it is that destabilises and stabilises social networks and power relationships. This perspective of looking at interlocking points or what Long and van der Ploeg call interlocking projects (1991), may be expressed also as the interweaving of action and context, or as the reflection of theoretical 'states of mind' and forms of speech in the networks by people interacting in everyday situations.

People interacting fuse and share knowledge, transform meaning (Long and Villarreal 1993) and maintain or mobilize networks. The problem is that, although this sometimes acquires a highly conflictive character and thus becomes visible, it is specially difficult to grasp in its routine operation. The point is that the interlocking points are blurred within everyday affairs and expressions and, in this sense, understanding the coherence in the alliances and associations of people is frequently problematic. In the political conflict described earlier, Jeannette's explanation was revealed as a puzzling ideological discourse. Certainly it could have been interpreted as a sort of orthodox 'feminist' discourse, - the diagnosis of a subordinated woman complaining of victimization by macho workers. However, this 'feminist' discourse was at the same time the expression of a more subtle, pragmatic manoeuvre, which was not grotesque or amoral but politically clever and used as a soft but incisive technique by those who do not forgive and who wish to advance in the career structure of the company.

In the case of the class position of the worker the transformation of meaning was tied to his search for autonomy. The dismantling of his oppositional attitude came after the concessions that allowed him to create a semi-autonomous but isolated *modus vivendi* in the management of the greenhouse. Other interesting transformations came after the abandoning of the authoritarian pretensions of the dismissed boss. To regain command within the power network, the new boss made concessions to achieve his aim of reinforcing the control over everyday operation by the group of planners facing the resistance of the others who had previously been involved.

Following workers through a series of interactional situations allows one to build a critical perspective from which to look at the fragility of the 'status quo', the inconsistencies of the 'official truth', the provisionality of company hierarchies, the failure of ideological and historical trends despite their continued operation. The logic in which these are grounded does not correspond to objective values and definitive truths but to political negotiations, management of resources and commercial operations contextualized

situationally.

The power of workers which sometimes emerged in the context of collective and abrupt interruptions of the productive process, was mostly exerted as a diffuse collection of initiatives, provisional set of coalitions, and mixed strategies. Following the specific circumstances of actual, ongoing struggles for power, the workers appeared not as a packed block of people who put into motion distinctive techniques and characteristic demands to underscore their personal or group interests. Hence, the fusion of images that workers projected were not only those of weak, submissive and disinterested workers worried only for their survival, but also those of tactical collaborators sharing positions with the boss and managers, and above all, those of self-reliance and subversion, calculating opportunities and enjoying semi-autonomous spaces, disseminating rumours against the use of pesticides or management mistakes, and defying authority through encouraging others to use their own specific political networks.

Despite the dominant ideological vogue which emphasizes the substitution of lay workers by professionals in the search for practical solutions to technical problems of production, skilled workers still make a difference, not only in terms of rendering more profitable investment in production for companies but above all in recreating the 'local conditions' of production, including of course the use of modern and sophisticated technology and equipment. Looking more critically at the propaganda effect, a last comment on the interlocking character of local and global influences is pertinent here. The picture presented by the American entrepreneur as well as the opinions of the workers, illustrate how locality bears upon knowledge, technical procedures etc. and how these processes take into account the needs and capabilities of workers and staff without pretending to follow strictly imported models from Florida or Israel. In this sense, it is not surprising that attention to cultural tastes and expressions, such as the Mexican penchant for sauces, and the capacities of workers could be a more fruitful tactic for managing a tomato company successfully than the idealistic transference of expensive and automatized equipment.

Notes

1. Villarreal suggests that power negotiations should be not depicted as big issues or discussions about legal frameworks, but practical moves, specific norms, ideas, values, interests, and feelings which are reflected by circumstantial and specific 'points of consensus'. She also points out that through concurring or dissenting from these points of consensus, people can interconnect or disconnect social networks when changing political alliances and loyalties. Maintaining power networks is less a question of

building institutions and structural hierarchies than it is of offering interesting initiatives and enrolling people in the creation of space or room for manoeuvre (see also Long 1984).

2. Latour insists that this methodological emphasis could make a radical difference in the analysis and suggests 'we do not have to start from stable actors, from stable statements, from stable repertoires of beliefs and interests, nor even from stable observers. And still, we regain the durability of social assemblage' (1991: 129).

3. Law (1991: 165) distinguishes four conceptions of power that are already developed in the sociological discussion: 'power to', 'power over', 'power/storage' and 'power discretion'. He also asserts that these should be linked to a fifth notion, that of power/effects with its stress on the continued performance of social relations. He argues that 'power to' and 'power over' may indeed (under certain circumstances) be stored and used in a discretionary and calculative manner. But he warns that these forms have to be treated as relational products, i.e. to store power or to have discretion in its development, is to enjoy (or suffer from) the effects of a stable network of relations.

4. In many passages of his writings, Foucault offers the idea of multiple expressions of resistance that are always involved in power relationships. In this way, he conceives of resistance as never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. He interprets power relationships instead as shaped by the multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. Thus, in an analysis of power relationships one must deal with problematic, mobile and transitory points of resistance. This includes producing cleavages in a society that is shifting, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, to furrow across individuals themselves cutting them up and remoulding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds (1981: 96)

5. Long defines 'social interfaces' as "the critical points of intersection or confrontation between groups or social units representing different interests, resources and levels of power. Analyzing interface situations aims to bring out the dynamic character of the interactions that take place and show how the goals, perceptions, interests, and relationships of the various actors are reshaped as a result of the interactions, leading to a "new" interface encounter the next time round" (1989: 254).

6. Don Daniel was a follower of a very well known Chilean naturist/therapist called Manuel Lezaeta. Don Daniel developed his career in a similar situation to Ricardo, curing himself after being discharged by the medical profession for being beyond help. He created a naturist centre in the region and continued his naturist and homeopathic studies. He was prosecuted by the Mexican Health Authorities for practising medicine without having formal medical qualifications. This background fitted well with his Ricardo's personal background since Don Daniel was also the son of a poor agricultural labourer. The centre created by Don Daniel has now acquired an international reputation and is visited by people who can pay the expensive fees from all over the world.

7. Long and van der Ploeg (1992: 23) argue that it is such a series of specific 'interlocking projects' of actors that creates, reproduces and transforms structures.

8. Chapter IV gives an account of the origins of this association, to which tomato producers and company owners are affiliated.

9. Twenty people took time off to attend the month's course, among them technicians and engineers working for companies and government institutions. Some students and company bosses also participated. The companies paid 1,000 dollars for each participant to attend. Jeannete was one of the two women agronomists receiving the training, consisting of three theoretical lectures per day on drip irrigation systems, with practical field demonstrations programmed for the last week. The confrontation between Chimino and the course director took place during the first of these demonstrations.

10. This was a recommendation to improve the efficiency of the equipment, something he had repeated continually throughout the course.

CHAPTER VI

THE FORCE OF IRONY: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEMATIC LIFEWORLDS OF TOMATO WORKERS

This chapter aims to deepen my enquiry into the everyday life of tomato workers. I do this by examining the interactions taking place in three working situations of different companies that are characterized by practices of irony. The ways in which groups of 'ordinary' workers exert irony during working circumstances and in particular use of irony when responding to the changing nature of their work, when recovering self-reliance and when fighting against the misjudgments of company staff, other workers and the researcher provide the foundations for developing a theoretical argument that refutes the idea that agricultural labourers cannot think strategically because of the alienated labour conditions to which they are subjected and because they do not readily exhibit a discursive consciousness of their strategies.

By focussing on the social make-up of irony the chapter continues the analysis of the politics of tomato work. I view irony as resulting from the social interrelations of groups of workers. My approach distance itself from the individualistic interpretation of irony by Rorty (1989) who associates it with liberalism, conceiving irony only as an effect or creation of individual performances. This implies that, although I acknowledge as an important contribution the anti-essentialist and contingent approach offered by Rorty, I differ from his liberal political perspective.¹⁾

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first discusses the significance of the concept of contingent utopias for interpreting the everyday life of tomato workers. The second offers an ethnography of the social make-up of irony and shows how during working situations context and action interweave. The third analyzes the sequences of working interactions and spells out their analytical and methodological implications. The fourth explores the use of irony as an analytical perspective for examining the problematic changing lifeworlds of tomato workers.

The significance of contingent utopias

In Chapter V, I suggested it was useful to analyze domination as a process that was not 'yet exerted'. This allowed me to present a different picture of power/knowledge asymmetries within everyday working life. Here I return to this focus to scrutinize tomato workers practices and their verbal expressions.

A question I repeatedly asked myself was how to construct a text in sociological language that concerns a philosophy of life whose meanings - from what I have learned in the fieldwork situations- are communicated in the attitudes and behaviour of everyday contexts.² In answering this question, de Certeau's conceptualization (1984) of everyday life can offer an encouraging perspective for assessing the diversity of oral forms that workers use in everyday life.³ His perspective also provides an opportunity to understand, what Silverstone calls elsewhere (1989: 78) 'pleasures of utopian thought and expression, both in the procedures and the narratives of the everyday'. However, this task of analyzing the dynamic oral expressions of everyday life among tomato workers is not without its contradictions.⁴ It may also imply ironic outcomes for the sociologist confronted with the job of writing down her/his understandings of workers' everyday life. As Goody suggests (1992) the writer and researcher can interrupt the dynamism of oral expressiveness by transforming her or himself into the tamer of the wild (i.e. the verbal representations of workers).⁵

The ethnographic material of this chapter look towards the multifaceted and circumstantially shared collective identities of workers (see Villarreal 1992). These identities are forged out of the heterogenous nature of tomato workers who are always on the move seeking jobs with the companies which characterize themselves as 'enterprises on wheels'. As Chapter III and IV showed, workers migrate constantly from one farm or company to the other or switch quickly from one activity to another. It is also the case that many workers are involved in second jobs, whether communal, non-waged work or paid activities organized by private proprietors or traders, or more independent craftwork or petty trading. For many, tomato work is a short-term activity after finishing schooling. For women - especially those from local communities - to work in the tomato industry means a temporary job that comes second to their household duties. Every squad displays an incredibly varied pattern of accumulated work experience.

The uncertain nature of tomato work throws up contradictory interpretations according to the circumstances. As Chapter IV observed, a patron's doubts may be seen as a call for worker sympathy when the survival of the tomato industry survival is at stake. But later the argument can be

presented in terms of security and convenience, when the patron prefers to establish provisional legal prescriptions concerning duties and above all a 'desirable' level of human rights. On the other hand, uncertainty is not in itself an obstacle for reaching the greatest profits in the shortest time; on the contrary, uncertainty can be given as a reason for not being able to guarantee better life conditions for workers.⁶ In this way, the official from the Ministry of Work takes provisionality as the main basis to justify his 'non interventionist policy', arguing that he cannot regulate the labour relations of rural labourers because they are facing a process of extinction (Astorga Lira: 1989: 43).

This contingent nature associated with the activity of workers points to an interesting analytical problem, i.e. how to approach the diversity of multifarious transient and occasional working day situations, while at the same time there is need for uninterrupted processes of tomato work. In other words, how can we look at the changing conditions of life of tomato workers as they mix in different squad and company groupings that constitute the backbone of the routine of production, and how is it possible to look at the emergent properties that result without slipping into reifications, because we cannot speak of 'a *tabula rasa*'.

Thus, from the outset it is my problem to pay attention to the phenomenon that tomato workers apparently live embedded in the present without any notion of utopia. Anyway, I am not able to make reference whatsoever to a historical narrative dealing with farm workers utopias to develop my argument. Here, I resort to similar reasoning as Lorraine Nencel (1992), who studied prostitutes in Peru⁷, to develop a notion of 'contingent utopias'⁸ that is useful for characterizing the fusion or association of actors, events and meanings concurring in working situations. My use of 'contingent utopia' also aims to convey the paradox of maintaining a vigilant attitude over an extended period of time for getting opportunities but without being secure about the outcomes. In this sense, my concept differs slightly since it includes the idea of pursuing a 'project'. What I am emphasizing in my use of utopia is the active and creative attitude of self determination. However, this does not require a full rhetorical and systematic elaboration, only the assumption of everyday forms of expression.

Workers 'contingent utopias' can reflect how they look at their prospects (i.e. how they manifest desires about how things could be better) from the standpoint of their everyday affairs, as expressed mainly through their emotional moods when facing specific domestic and working situations. In this way, they may continue doing their jobs for years and, although not happy at all with their actual conditions, may achieve their goals. From this perspective is possible to follow 'the drama and the dreams' of workers and their histories as social

groups involved in various disciplinary practices and plans. As Chapter IV showed, there are multiple historical traces underlying tomato work processes but no one history in which a pre-existent utopia is triumphantly reached or tragically not reached. There are no essential or ontological differentials of class and economic conditions separating one group of people from the other, but contingently created relations within specific, local and provisional circumstances where distinctions, accumulated privileges and powers reflect differences in standards of living and life styles that contextualise the everyday life of different groups.

For some workers the hand of God is present in the discrimination or liberation of people. However, they attribute only the individual misfortune to God's design. Variations in this religious interpretation can also legitimate the meaning of class divisions. In this sense, other workers firmly interpret the submission of the poor as provoked by the rich (Stolcke 1988: 171)

There is a coincidence between Rorty's ideas of 'de-divinization' and contingency with the observation by Verena Stolcke on workers' discursive expressions. Rorty makes a plea for a horizontally constituted human world wherein human beings embody the finitude of their discourses and concepts from their dialogue with other human beings (1989:45). The fear of dying and the acknowledgement of incompleteness which accompanies the existence of all human beings is a basic point of equality which inspires a de-divinizing approach in which Rorty regard dying not as paralysing but as an incentive to human processes, because it prompts all people to fulfil something in her/his short time. Rorty eventually appraises dying as the final point of equality, but paradoxically as the most circumstantially differentiated event which can upset all social orders, hierarchies and boundaries. In a strikingly similar manner, Verena Stolcke observes that the discourse on death by Brazilian workers has a significant political meaning:

'death is the great equaliser which knows no difference between rich and poor.. and serves to assert the common humanity of all people irrespective of worldly power' (1988: 169).

Next, I would like to look at one specific situation in order to analyze how these 'contingent utopias' operate and how they express the changing conditions of workers' lifeworlds. What I want to argue can be expressed more precisely using a story as narrated to me by Don Luis, the 87 year old father of one of the workers. During a large family party, he gave this account to describe the traits of his father, who had been a dayworker for the *hacienda* of Ahuacapan. Don Luis laughs to himself before speaking of this mischief, reminding me of someone who smacks his lips in anticipation of the dish he is about to eat. Then

he starts his story:

"What I am about to tell happened during the days when there was revolution all over [beginning of the century, probably around 1912]. It was a prank played on a goat of the *hacienda*, a small prank that became a very big one. The goat was large, beautiful, well formed. The *hacendado* treated it as a pet, and it was allowed to go from house to house where the workers fed it on rubbish and maize kernels.

It was the day of the new year *fiesta* and at two o'clock in the morning my father went to help the butcher kill a bull for the banquet. The butcher kept the old dry bladders from other animals he had killed, and it was at that time of the night, when the whole town was asleep, that they thought of the prank. It was just a joke, something to be remembered by. They filled the bladders with dry beans so they would make a lot of noise and tied them to the hind legs of the goat, which happened to be sleeping nearby. The frightened animal fled, bellowing through the small streets of the village, followed by an ever increasing hoard of dogs awakened by the noise. In search of shelter the poor goat went into several houses, knocking down chairs awakening the whole town.

In the confusion, someone yelled that the devil was loose, and it could have appeared as such, since the shining eyes of the animal in the dark night and the commotion of noise gave the incident an extraordinary tone. The commotion increased to the point that a terrified old man fell - which later caused his death - and a pregnant woman had an abortion. The rumour that the devil was loose reached the ears of the priest, who, agreeing that it probably had to do with the devil, performed some special exorcisms to rid the town of it. In the end the dogs killed the goat and the people who discovered the prank went into fits of laughter."

Don Luis ends his story by explaining that his father and the butcher had to flee the hacienda for fear of reprisals, although they both later returned to fight for the land as *agraristas*. The case shows the intricacies of the changing situation and how in the same situation images projecting future circumstances emerged simultaneously and expressed contrasting meanings. For most of the villagers the situation was the reproduction of conditioned behaviour while for a few of them it was a prophecy of change. Of course, the case can also be considered as a mere prank which brings us back to the form of games the workers of the *hacienda* were playing, but it can also be seen as a sign of the predisposition of the authors of the prank to perceive the change in the situation. It is possible that they could not have verbally explained the strategic objectives of the revolution - which of course was experienced differently in the different regions and by different people - but they could act in accordance with a clear

understanding of the loss of legitimacy of the *hacendado*. The goat was a symbol, he was the *hacendado*'s favourite and an instrument that they chose when touching upon the weakness of the *hacienda* system.

Most of the villagers acted according to their reading of the situation. It was unclear for them and they preferred to explain it as the work of the devil, confirmed more institutionally by the priest who found this story more in keeping with the moral authority of the *hacendado*. Eventually, when the hacienda disappeared most of the actors could find the prophetic meaning of the 'contingent utopia' and it was enjoyed among the *agraristas* as a prank played with the new 'loose devil' in the form of the loss of legitimacy of the *hacendado*.

In the uninterrupted process of everyday life one can observe that some actions, points or incidents emerge and highlight at least for fleeting moments what is poignantly meaningful to the ongoing processes of groups of workers and their lifeworlds. The important things to identify in these fleeting moments are the discontinuities and continuities. It was at this point that I became aware of the force of the 'concept of irony' to characterise the lifeworlds of these fresh and blood tomato workers.⁹ I learned from Genovese that black American slaves had found a very powerful weapon in presenting the transformation of their lives as tragi-comedies. Genovese's interpretation is that such oppressed people, who can laugh at their oppressors, contain within themselves a politically dangerous potential. He contends: 'they bore their adversity so well because they never ceased to laugh at themselves. And by laughing at themselves, they freed themselves to laugh at their masters. Through their satire and behind their masks they asserted their rights as men and women' (Genovese 1973: 584).

In the previous Chapters there are many examples of how certain aggregate social conditions reproduce themselves. I define these aggregates as ironies of life or ironic conditions emerging through different practices of irony embodying 'states of mind' and 'figures of speech' that individuals or groups of workers and staff enact within everyday life situations. I associate these ironies of life with disadvantageous circumstances, judgements, biases, social differences, hard working conditions, increasing deskilling and the substitution of workers by technicians in key positions. In the next sections I will use irony as an analytical perspective to explore different sets of working situations. In this way I place the practices of irony alongside 'the people in context'.

The social make-up of irony

This part offers ethnographical material that depicts different patterns of interaction as they emerge in the context of work routines and situations. My purpose is to construct profiles of workers' collective behaviour grounded in the images resulting from the concrete sets of activities during working days. These images are reshaped by new unfolding sets of actions. Hence, ironic conditions resulting from the daily scenarios are not fixed structural constraints but 'contextualities' prompted by the actions of workers i.e. they come to the fore when exercises of irony dominate the situation and create a relaxed social atmosphere that invites greater boldness. In other words, I will look at the different practices of irony enacted by workers, paying attention to the 'states of mind' and 'figures of speech' used. This implies understanding the practical logics operating in working circumstances as modes of self-sufficiency, even though they may apparently deploy negative methods by promoting disinterest or the tendency to denigrate the established order.

From isolated games to collective ones

During my interactions with the workers, I never aimed to register each action, joke or interruption of the work rhythm that might possibly have a meaning different from that complying with the company's orders or with working norms. It would probably have been impossible to do so anyway, and would have represented an artificial procedure similar to experimenter's mouse traps. However, my field notes record a wide range of attitudes, ranging from extreme irresponsibility to the most diligent fidelity to the instructions of the authority or its representatives. The gestures and attitudes that accompany actions oscillate between seriousness and happiness or revolve around the most exasperating triviality and the most subtle application of the double meaning of words. But among this diversity I noted a marked preference for jokes, mockery, ridicule and games.

For the moment, I will not detail the 'untouchables', the 'sacred' issues that are respected or are taboo (which would entail a different analysis), but the others, those that are most liked and resorted to: the mocking of authority and representatives of the boss or "patron", and the ridiculing of themselves and their worker conditions. Once the game is unleashed it extends both to those present and those absent, and is sustained, nourished, changed and finished as fast as it emerges. The closest objects are mostly recipient of reiterated games. For example, some of the most common games are the competitions to see who

can throw a tomato the furthest, tomato fights in which the fruits are flying from one row to another, and the hiding of work tools, clothes and lunch bags, etc.

When I decided to focus my attention on such games (three months after starting field work), I began to register some habits and recurrent activities: the way they take advantage of the position they have to endure while cutting tomatoes, for example. The cutters will stand in adjacent rows while working on the same plants and this gives them the opportunity to touch or hold hands. This might be interpreted as an affective gesture, but it may also be mockery, especially when it is a woman towards a male cutter. She could be saying something like: "I am robbing you!"¹⁰ Often one of them would have a spiny or sharp object in the hand to scratch the other's hand. Some pranks consisted of doing harm to someone who is not liked, such as putting obstacles in his way to delay him so that he will be scolded, or hiding his lunch bag so that he will be late returning to work. But some pranks go so far as to hamper all the chores of the ranch or of a sector of the company, e.g. when they deflate one of the tyres of the tractor or of the company or department representative's truck. Certain acts of pilfering are taken as pranks, such as taking tomatoes home and taking advantage of work implements or other agricultural products such as fertilizers, pesticides, etc. The achievements most celebrated are trips to the cane fields where sexual challenges and games are claimed to have taken place.

However, such behaviours occurred as isolated sparks that allowed me to decipher some meaning, but mostly vanished as soon as they began. It was through those occasions when the games lasted longer and involved a whole group, where games and other actions intermingled, that I could really clarify some of the contexts of understanding. I present three of these situations in more detail.

External intervention: the sociologist and the snake

Situational context

Chronologically the actions occurred on two of the last days of the tomato cutting season. Perhaps it was for this reason that the work atmosphere seemed more relaxed. The *cuadrilla* (work squad) was made up of 45 people, mostly young and more than half of them women. All the workers came from two neighbouring villages and the crop they were to pick belonged to a small entrepreneur, the owner of the tomato company (a nephew of General García Barragán). The twenty hectares of land - the only land this *tomatero* had sown

that season - was rented from a group of ejidatarios. It was the last of the five years that the company would cultivate this land before returning it to the ejidatarios, together with the well that the *tomatero* had drilled as part of the agreement, and some other infrastructure. This last fact drew the attention of the research team who planned to study the imminent change from three different angles: the behaviour of the entrepreneur, of the ejidatarios, and of the workers, which was my task to follow. This was the purpose of my relation with this *cuadrilla*.

I started by conducting some interviews with them, following the guidelines agreed upon by the research team. We were interested in discovering their views on the history of the crop, the organization of the work process and the consequences that the change would bring about for the workers and their families. As I knew none of them before, I also had to collect basic information. The leader of the *cuadrilla* and the son of the *tomatero* provided some general information and, after interviewing two workers, I felt I had a more comprehensive view of the situation. Perhaps because I felt that to continue would imply going around in circles, or because I was unsatisfied with the results and did not know exactly how to continue, I started an informal conversation with some of the members of the *cuadrilla*.

Interactive sequence

I was standing between the furrows where five cutters were working and one of them was making one joke after another. He tried several of them on me, scrutinizing my capacity to understand his double meanings and answer his riddles...

"Tu me pegas, yo me enojo, tu me juegas el manojo, que es?" (you hit me and I am angry, you play with my 'ding-a-ling', what am I?)

As I did not answer, he explained laughingly that it was the bell. Obviously he was not referring to the bell and was hoping I would catch the sexual connotation of it. I was a bit disconcerted by the situation, and by defensive instinct I took out my notebook and started writing what they were narrating. That made the nature of my presence as an agent external to the group more evident and the game of the jokes and notes began.

The joker was putting pressure on me to find out what I was writing. I explained I was registering his jokes and riddles, and how they liked to pass the time pleasantly. This relaxed the atmosphere¹¹⁾ between the five cutters who

then continued to try me with their jokes or biting riddles. For a while they continued to ask if I knew such and such a joke, but gradually requested only that I write them down. The uproar of laughter from the small group caught the attention of the rest of the *cuadrilla*, especially of some of the young women, who approached us curiously to see what was going on. The joker noticed this, and perhaps by an effect of interactional "modus vivendi" (Goffman 1959: 21), he lowered his voice and asked me to come closer, saying it embarrassed him to let the girls listen. On the other hand, suggestions as to what jokes the group should tell me started coming from other workers in more distant furrows, who passed the word along. They mentioned one about a siren, another about a donkey and the ocean, about the nuns, about the parrot and about a disfigured man.

The girls' curiosity was apparently increasing, and when they reached the end of their furrow they changed to a row that was closer to us. Others of a more timid nature, who had just been listening, also came near and started telling jokes they knew. There was, however, an old man, smelling of alcohol, who was murmuring..

"I don't bite the bait, who knows what things this guy's jotting down for the *patron* [boss]"

While they were narrating different jokes to me, I overheard the girls telling jokes among themselves, and they were urging Chayo, apparently the boldest of the group, to come up to me and relate them. She finally gathered courage¹² and came up to me from behind and said,

"If you want to hear some good ones, move behind with us and we'll tell them to you" ..

I turned towards them, entering their circle. Chayo was laughing before she started, in what I interpreted as shyness, and the others urged her to start. She finally asked me,

"let's see, tell me, in what way are a women and a tomato alike?"

I could not reply, and so she offered the answer:

"*Que los dos le quitan lo bravo al chile.* [In that they both take the sting out of the chile]."

She was using the double sense of *bravo* which also means *picante* or hot, and

of *chile* which, besides being a spicy vegetable, is used to refer to the male sexual organ. I was feeling really uncomfortable and must have shown it for they started acting a bit more sympathetically, but still asking if I was feeling bashful and if I was married.

They had to make an effort to be patient while I finished writing down one joke before they could tell another. I was relieved when someone - a man, fortunately - called me from another furrow to tell me some jokes that he claimed I really had to write down. This request was followed by several others from different parts of the field. Obviously word had got around and I went from one extreme of the ranch to the other.

While the day's work was almost over, the game seemed to have no end. The *jefe*, the foreman of the ranch and head of the shift called the people round him so that he could communicate an order from the boss in which he explained that since the price of the tomato had risen and the tomatoes were still in good condition, it would be necessary to organize an extra working group for the coming Sunday (it was now Friday).¹³⁾ Almost no one paid attention, and after the interruption, they returned to the game with more energy. They even called the *jefe*, and asked him to also divulge the good jokes he knew. He did contribute some. Before leaving, they invited me to return the following day and to bring a recorder so that I would not tire of so much writing.

The next day I returned with the tape recorder, as I felt authorized by them to use it. However, the atmosphere had changed, they appeared to recoil in front of the apparatus, as though there was the possibility of unseen, and who knows whose, ears listening. The old man seemed to have convinced the others of his point of view, and he repeated aloud his suspicion over the motives of my questions:

"See, I told you this guy was "rayando" (receiving wages) at our expense and maybe he will even sell a book on our jokes!"

The situation was uncertain for me. When I tried to start a dialogue with other workers, I felt the conversation to be strained. Suddenly, some loud shrieks were heard..

"Catch it! Trap it! Don't let it go!"

Two of the workers were darting about between the furrows to catch an animal or whatever. They called others for help and finally it was circled by several men who took control of the situation. It was a large snake, the kind they called *chirriónera*, which describes the way it lashes its tail about and can strike hard. Several men were holding it, until the one that had been telling most of the

jokes began to throw it around. He started with the girls, and then it became a real collective game accompanied by lots of innuendos and double meanings with phrases like, "que se te mete la viborita", "que te pica" (it will get its tongue into you; it will bite you, etc), as the snake was hurled around.

After incorporating me into the games, they asked me to record them. Next they asked to listen to the recordings, making a circle around me. The theme of the snake aroused new jokes and riddles. The day again went fast between joke telling, and at its end the *jefe* repeated the request for an extra group to work on the Sunday. However, people did not appear to heed him.

Some weeks later I returned to visit the group. Many had dispersed, but those remaining still remembered the game of the jokes and the notes, as well as the snake. In response to my question, they explained that that Sunday the *jefe* and the son of the boss had been obliged to visit the workers, house by house, and had managed even so to get only half the group to work the extra shift, in spite of the promise of soft drinks and double pay.

The dishonour and the party

Situational context

These situations occurred chronologically at two contrasting times, in terms of work activity. The affront happened in the greenhouse on one of those days when planting activity was at its height, since they needed to make up for the time lost through rain, and there was the risk that all the work so far invested in the forty hectares of tomatoes would be for nothing. This resulted in considerable pressure on the group of workers. The party was celebrated when activity in the greenhouse was very low. The opportunity seized for organizing it was the birthday of the head of the greenhouse, Alfonso.

The event took place among the greenhouse workers of a tomato company which I will call Cobras. That year the company had prepared 200 hectares for planting, which represented the largest single area of land in the region under tomato cultivation. The number of workers varied. At one point there were fifteen, but there were as many as 95 when the work was pressing. On the day of the affront, a group of about 80 people were at work in the greenhouse. Most of the workers came from different *barrios*, neighbourhoods of Autlán, the most important town of the region. Of the 45 women and 35 men present, many were students who were taking advantage of their vacation period to work, five of whom were particularly conspicuous, as they were agronomy students from the State University located in the region. Three of them were in

their last semesters of study and two had just finished their studies. They were addressed respectfully as *inges* (short for engineer) and *medios inges* (half engineers) by the rest of the workers, apparently as a way of making explicit the general recognition that lack of opportunity and real need was why they had had to take jobs as simple workers. These young people facilitated my communication with some of the female workers of the group and made me appear as less external, especially since they included me in the friendly atmosphere of relations that they had developed during the six weeks they had worked together. The group also included five old men who performed specific tasks like carrying the plants in wheelbarrows. The rest devoted their time to planting, cleaning, washing, watering, and placing the separate plants in large trays to be taken to the field. The head of the greenhouse controlled the work. He is an experienced worker who has been in charge for seven years, and receives his orders from the technician responsible and from the boss.

What motivated me to interact with the group at that moment was my interest in understanding the different kinds of organization of the greenhouses. I was particularly interested in following the career of the 'head of department' Alfonso, who had been the apprentice of another experienced worker. This experienced worker had been "head" in replacement of a resigning female engineer. This particular greenhouse had been designed in compliance with modern techniques that had been adapted by another company, which I will call Camelia, which had incorporated a scientific analysis of the organization of a working day. A few days previously, a chemist of the company (who also participated in the course narrated in Chapter V and whose knowledge was well recognised by workers) had told me about a dialogue between the bosses and the technical personnel of the company on the different diseases of the tomato plant and fruit, during which it had been concluded that they were often due to the bad working habits of the labourers. Thus they had concluded that it was important to modify their conduct, however difficult this might be.

Interactive sequence

Those in charge of the technical department of the company had come across many cases of damaged plants which had to be thrown out before planting. An investigation revealed that the cause of this was the long fingernails of the female workers in the greenhouse. It appeared that when taking the plants out of the pre-planting trays, they mishandled their fragile stalks, causing small incisions that left the plants useless. The boss of the company thus called upon Alfonso, as head of the greenhouse, to ensure that all the women who worked

at this task cut their fingernails.

Alfonso arrived in the work area, and summoned together his people. Twenty-five female workers had been busy in the four square metre room. The rest of the team, who were outside, came in. Alfonso began,

"I have received instructions from above that all female workers should have their fingernails cut as they are damaging the plants."

Several women expressed their fury, screaming at him that it was false. But Alfonso, in his capacity as head of the greenhouse, insisted that the command came from above and it had to be obeyed. He explained that he and Paquita - who was a worker herself but also his *comadre* and apparently trusted by him - would cut their nails, and that he already had the necessary instruments to do so. So the fact that Alfonso also had to include his own *comadre* and his sister among the victims aggravated the situation.

There was general uproar. Some of the girls ran to get away from the victimizer, some hid behind the trays, while others stayed and put on a challenging attitude. Three girls accepted the situation and had their nails cut, but there were no other voluntary candidates. The male workers were making the situation worse by clapping and demanding in chorus "*otra, otra*" (next, next). Alfonso then asked them to help him bring in the ones that had not yet had their nails cut. It took almost three hours of struggle. The atmosphere turned almost festive, while girls that were caught fell to the floor and pointed out those that had not yet been victimized, even helping to chase them. They later explained it had been a game for them.

Olivia was one of the three that resisted until the end. She argued that their nails would look ugly and that it would be several months before they could have them long again. Olivia accused the others of being fools for having allowed the situation, and claimed that long nails were very useful for the work since they facilitated the retrieval of extra seeds when too many had gone into the coconut hay in the small tray compartments. In the end, she was the only one that did not allow her nails to be cut.

The worst part of the day was having to recover the lost time. Alfonso made them work four extra hours, and his mood radically altered, screaming and scolding the workers over the smallest detail. He insisted they use a special saw to separate the plants in the tray one by one, and demanded that they did not pull hard or take several out at a time. Many complaints could be heard around the room, especially from Paquita, Olivia and other women. Others began to say that they were not paid fairly, especially when it came to extra time. A bit later bantering and witticisms began to appear: that it was time to

quit, that it was the last tray (when there were at least 20 more to come), that the boss had sent a special dinner from an expensive restaurant, etc.

It was obvious that no one was following Alfonso's instructions very precisely. The men were supposed to be carrying the boxes full of seedlings from the greenhouse to the groups of five or six women who had to root out and separate the plants and put them in boxes ready for the field. Then they would take these boxes to the trucks. Everyone was expected to take great care in their handling of the plants, but this was done only when Alfonso was around. Olivia explained to me how the process should be done in his presence, because in his absence the boxes would be carelessly shoved about and the plants pulled out by the dozen. It was getting late and the darkness was taken advantage of to throw many plants into the rubbish can which they would normally have kept as replacements.

After a short while, they had devised an alarm mechanism to signal when Alfonso was approaching. They tied a long string to a tomato box located near one of the groups. The other end of the string was left on the floor of the passageway. The men running up and down with the boxes could therefore easily signal danger. If the head of the greenhouse was approaching, one of them would pull the string, making enough noise to alert everyone. When it was time to go, the boss sent two trucks to take the people home, which was unusual, since they normally walked home. However, only ten people accepted the 'favour', the rest preferred to walk.

I met Paquita, Carmen, Olivia and the five agricultural engineers on other occasions and they referred to that day as the worst of the year and a real tragedy. On one occasion the three girls invited me to a party they were planning in the greenhouse to celebrate the birthday of Alfonso. They had been collecting money for some time on a voluntary basis from the workers to provide for the drinks and the music.¹⁴⁾ All the greenhouse workers and even people from the other sections of the company were invited. The women were to prepare the food and the men were expected to buy the beer and tequila.

The party took place on a Sunday, at the same work place, and three months after the day of the affront. All of the victims of the fingernail cutting attended, elegantly dressed. Several had gifts for Alfonso, and between them they had bought a large cake which they decorated with red carnations. They had summoned a professional photographer for the occasion and posed for him behind the trays of plants, or with their friends and relatives, beside the musical instruments or dancing.

They asked the musicians for a special waltz to dance with Alfonso, which was repeated so that he could dance with most of the women, except Olivia, who refused. As an extra gift for Alfonso, they had prepared a small show, in

which they imitated several famous artists, T.V. style. Paquita was the master of ceremonies and seven of the girls, clad in miniskirts and low cut dresses, danced and threw imaginary kisses to the audience. One of the men, not wishing to let the opportunity pass, went up to the "stage", pretending to be a fan, to embrace and kiss the "artiste".

The girls then bid Alfonso to come onto the "stage", as Paquita had also prepared a card with some poetic thoughts dedicated to him which spoke of perseverance, of moral values and friendship. They handed him the card, but he was not allowed to go back to his place. Instead, Paquita offered the microphone to the men to give them a chance to say something to Alfonso. One of the workers got up and said that he wished the best to Alfonso in his life and hoped that he would maintain the unity between the group of workers and that he would be as happy as he was today.

Alfonso thanked them for the party and said that this was the best moment of his thirty-one years of life. During the chaos of the farewells, somebody asked him about the time of arriving to work the next day. He said that it would be different that day, as he did not really know at what time the people should arrive after having been so late at the party.

The stoppage for being labelled "burras"

Situational context

The first reference I had to the group of workers from the town of Aticama came from Chimino, an expert base-level worker in irrigation techniques whom I had seen make an international expert look ignorant during a course on irrigation for technicians. Chimino claimed that the workers of Aticama were *unos chingones* (a crude way of saying a fierce bunch), because they had managed to impose their own rules on the tomato company and went in and out of work whenever they wanted, and worked by task, not like the rest of the employees, who had to work by the day.

That season the group had gathered together some 92 workers, most of whom were women. The first day I met them there were 60 of them, 32 women and 28 men. They had been working for ten consecutive years for the Camelia company, and claimed to have worked on all kinds of chores involved with tomatoes.

The town of Aticama is located in the mountains approximately 100 kilometres from the irrigated district of Autlan and El Grullo, and is only accessible by a small, rocky road. The group became involved with the Camelia

company through friendship with an old worker who helped them find a house each year in the valley so that they did not have to endure the six hours of daily travel to and from their town. In this way they spent the week in the valley and went home at weekends. That year the group decided not to rent a house but to persuade the company instead to provide them with a transport service. They also forced the company through a long stoppage to reduce the working day for them to only six hours, from seven a.m. to one p.m.¹⁵⁾

The group acknowledged a man called Jaime as their representative and recognized him as an authority. They also had two *cabos*, overseers, leading the *cuadrillas*. Most of the workers were young people. On the day in question the *cuadrillas* from Aticama were organized into two groups, men in one and women in the other. They were working in two neighbouring ranches of the Camelia company, where there were big problems due to a lack of workers. It could be seen immediately that cultivation was way behind schedule. The plants were so top heavy some of them were dropping their fruit. In fact the company had been able to cultivate only 100 of the 180 hectares it had programmed.

Interactive sequence

I had previously prepared a checklist for myself, focusing on the previous conflicts aimed at reducing the work schedule and the system of payment by task. I was interested in recording all possible organizational characteristics that the group might have developed in its struggle to satisfy their demands.

The situation I found myself in was a bit equivocal. Jaime, the group representative and the *cabo* answered my questions politely enough while they worked but the conversation centred on the difficulties of the particular tasks they were carrying out that day and in particular the *poceada*, hole drilling.¹⁶⁾

It was not until later that day that some of the younger people who were working in the adjacent furrow asked what I was doing, as I was pretty conspicuous with my notebook and tape recorder. "Hey", one asked,

"you earn wages like that, being a *catrincito* (someone well dressed who does not dirty his hands) and coming in your car. What do you work at?"

Another then asked what political party I was from, and wanted to know if I knew anything about the *Cardenistas*, the new opposition party that was causing commotion at that time. Meanwhile, I heard Jaime speaking to someone with raised voice saying:

"One suffers and endures hunger to find people, and then they just sack them like this. It's the pits (*esta de la chingada*).

It was then that the *cuadrilla* of Aticama women who were heading towards them appeared. Everybody stopped working. One boy asked the *cabo* to be allowed to approach them to see what was amiss, but the others were already heading in that direction. Someone commented that the situation had turned hot, because

"when the women enter things, the men cannot back off" [*cuando las viejas le entran los hombres no se pueden rajar*].

Another worker, now in a more communicative mood, explained to me that on another occasion they had experienced a similar situation in which they went on stoppage to demand a special schedule. He said jokingly that I should act as a reporter on this occasion and record the whole issue. I offered the recorder to Chito, one of the youngest workers who was walking beside us, and he accepted immediately. His friend advised him to hide it so that the women would not get annoyed, or even better, that he should pretend to be listening to music. Chito happily said he was the reporter from *siete dias* (a news T.V. programme in Mexico).

Jaime approached the women and asked what had happened. Several of them answered at once, screaming that they would not work anymore. They were extremely angry. Rita (one of the women workers) explained furiously:

"They (company representatives) called us *burras* (literally donkeys, but meaning stupid). They were saying our work is no good...".

Another woman interrupted:

"they got angry because Lorenzo (the *cabo* that had been appointed by the group) defended us and would not heed Maribel (a female *cabo* imposed by the company). She went off to report to the *jefe* of the farm and he came to scold us.

Jaime advised them to discuss between themselves what to do, and he would wait for the boss and

"then we should get out of here [*nos vamos a la fregada*], one cannot stand these people."

The women found out that Chito had been recording, and everyone wanted to listen, although one of them said she would break his apparatus. The head of the company personnel department, Felipe, arrived in his truck. Someone voiced the idea that Jaime should go with the group and not speak to him alone. Felipe summoned Jaime and the *cabos* to his truck, shouting that he wanted to speak to them, but in reply the whole group surrounded the vehicle and he could not even get out. I could not hear what they were saying, but the women were waving their hands and shouting indignantly.

Meanwhile I engaged in a conversation with the people that stayed beside the furrows. One of them asked me if I was not going to get into trouble with the bosses of the company for being there, and then the conversation turned to the history of Aticama and their coming *fiesta*, and I began to see many connecting threads. "We have fared badly in Aticama ever since our grandfathers went as *cristeros* ¹⁷⁾ and we received no land. The land that should be ours is controlled by the rich people of Toliman (the small capital of that municipality). There have been struggles for the land but they killed the leaders, one 22 years ago and the other only two years ago. Don Trinito has been helping us, but he is going a bit mad the poor man, from so many years of strife. Recently we had much hope, and even a well intentioned priest was helping us. We got together with five other groups of the region, which is how we got the land we have on the hill slopes, and why we were able to help reconstruct our houses after the earthquake. And we are now trying to get our man to the municipal seat, but when Don Salva was killed..." He then explained that they had a *corrido* (a ballad) that told of their ordeals and I asked him to give me the words:

Year of '86, I wouldn't want to remember,
 Because the town of Aticama was dressed in mourning;
 The Indian of the west died at the hands of a criminal.
 From the day that he died all his people are blazing.
 He had a struggle on his hands and a strong aspiration to win.
 He wanted for his *paisanos* [countrymen] the land and liberty.
 With this I say farewell landowners, sirs
 You put an end to the Indian and your worries are over."

The people who had been to negotiate with Felipe had returned. They appeared satisfied, saying that the agreement was that Maribel, the *caba* who had been imposed on them by the company and who had insulted them, would take another group. They were also promised more respect, and would not be called names, etc. The women took the opportunity to invite Felipe to the town *fiesta* and informed him that they would be absent a week from work. The fact that

they had avoided a grumbling attitude from the company representatives to their absenteeism in the high season was apparently an important concession gained for the group. The satisfactory nature of this agreement was reinforced by the feeling of freedom to celebrate the *fiesta* and invite Felipe to come.

During one of my visits to Aticama, this time on the occasion of the wedding of one of the women who had participated in the stoppage, I asked again about that day. I wanted to know if there had been any previous planning and how the women had decided to stop working. The issue proved difficult to discuss. Someone mentioned that she had spoken informally to other women in the tortilla mill ¹⁸ that morning before going to work, but that had been on the day they had negotiated their schedule. There was also some talk in the street in front of the school between two of the boys who had been working in other regions, who were commenting about the experiences that they had heard from other workers. But the conversation would always drift to other issues closer to their present interests. I was told about their nice peaceful town where everybody knew each other and where they are all invited to weddings and all pray together when someone dies and about the divisions existing between themselves and those who lived on the other side of the river, about the show-offs that come from the USA and are not the same as when they left, about their lack of land, about the unkept promises of politicians, etc.

Analyzing situations

This section focuses on an interpretation of the ethnographic situations outlined above in terms of what I call the 'legitimated' profiles of collective behaviour. This signifies that it is possible to characterise the type of behaviour manifested in the tactical measures performed by these groups of workers as collective actions in spite of the problem of establishing a coherent explanation of the strategizing of the leaders and groups, and of the working of the social networks involved in these situations. However, I do not intend to imply homogeneous or uniform modes of conduct, not because class or ethnic dimensions do not exist but because of the difficulty of assuming their central role. The reader will find traces of class and ethnic issues intermingled in the situations but such commitments and images do not exhaust their complexity.

The three situations I present highlight an important methodological conclusion: The emergence of the underlying realities could only partially be constructed by the researcher (see also Habermas 1987,II: 403). In addition, they materialized not only through preconceived and articulated language in tune with previous guidelines and checklists, but mainly through experiencing

behaviour triggered off by artifacts, such as the game of notes and jokes, the tape recorder, the snake, the cutting of fingernails, the affront and the stoppage. These artifacts carry with them the chain of contexts in which the interaction is embedded.

The first situation highlights the way an atmosphere is created, and - a point to which Goffman (1959: 26) alludes - how all groups always have a stock of games at hand (as knowledge and world views) that operate as a catharsis. It also shows how this stock is added to and accumulates in the process. Looking at this humorous atmosphere, one can also read the detachment of the group of workers with respect to the plans and interests of the company. It is a sort of natural revenge implemented collectively.

The situation also shows how certain boundaries and restraints emerge, and how 'states of mind' change according to different emotional dispositions. For a moment we perceive them as salient, but then they transform or modify themselves in the process. For example, the sociologist, his notes vis-à-vis the worker and his jokes, are at one moment identified as representing the gap between 'internal' and the 'external', but when the humorous climate generalizes itself and a collective game is unleashed, the boundaries between internal and external are reconstituted and mixed with the sexual boundaries between male and female.

With respect to the 'figures of speech' and the content of the jokes, riddles and double meanings of words, there are various implications. For example, as the researcher I could identify my doubts and the mockery against me by the workers, but I felt uncomfortable with the repressive ideas about sexual morals, and the revenge against refinements and conventions of language. From the point of view of the female worker, mockery of her condition as a woman was expressed, but at the same time apparent indifference towards being considered a sexual object. The situation also revealed certain successful forms of unplanned resistance, triggered by moments of achievement when workers found better ways of enduring the work. This highlights the fact that workers never surrendered totally to their bosses, although their contingent utopia or alternative dreams for their lifeworlds did not go so far as to imagine themselves managing their own tomato farms.

The second situation described destroys the dogmatic idea that acute humiliation or exploitation simply brings about more belligerence. For women, fingernails are the very symbols of their femininity. To have them cut was to accept a real defeat which they allowed in the last instance as a game or tragic-comedy that helped them to save face. But, at the same time, they tried to turn the tables and make the authority suffer the consequences.

Challenging attitudes take on two forms: either an apparently resigned

attitude or an extremely careless attitude in the face of technical explanation concerning the damage to plants or the exasperating procedures of the head of the greenhouse. But attitudes can nevertheless, at the same time, voice hard criticisms towards what is seen as an the illegal imposition of extra hours by the 'patron' or towards the false promises made or the privileged conditions such as the boss who can live off his expenses. Olivia makes manifest the open but exceptional case of resistance. This example is useful in that it gives a glimpse of a deeper dimension of resistance behaviour: of how much of his creative genius the worker is willing to put at the boss's disposal. Olivia claims that it is the boss who will lose more by cutting their nails, since he is depriving himself of skills that require precision (i.e. pulling out extra seeds) in everyday work.

The party that followed can be understood as a reconquest, an opportunity for workers to recover their self-reliance, and, perhaps, also to express a 'contingent utopia' based on the belief in the possibility of workers managing the tomato farm. This is achieved through the image of unity and the good atmosphere that generated among the workers (as they directly tell Alfonso). At least, it can be interpreted as a pleasant escape from conflictive situations. The workers appropriate the working space on Sunday (a day on which the companies find it difficult to get willing labour) and use their extra-hours in a more relaxing way. The self-reliant nature of the situation is ratified by the presence of the photographer, hired to present the women as beautiful and transformed by their finery that day, but also to produce a different picture, evidence of a transformed work space (adorned for the party).

The party also represents a lesson for Alfonso and the other men for their macho conduct. Clearly the play acting of Paquita and the other women is addressed to them. They are targeted, in the sense that the women make them see that, yes, they are indeed women - and decent women - not afraid of being considered sexual objects since they are secure in the management of their condition as women. On the other hand, the appropriation of television practices also suggests a sort of criticism against the inaccessibility of the media which, in principle, should be open to all people. They start from an ideal situation and adapt the sketch of their conditions in the way used by TV, feeling as free and important in their own milieu as the privileged artists.

The third case represents the ironic extremity of my experience in sociological work. When it seemed that finally I would experience a moment of 'collective conduct' expressed in terms of 'class resistance', and that I would be able to follow it closely since I was well assimilated to the actors, it seemed to slip through my fingers. Chimino had spoken of class behaviour in the collective actions of the Aticama group and I was expecting to be involved in

it or at least to relieve it. But in the end, the performance of this 'collective action' did not correspond to any strategic plan or detailed, preconceived process of change; it remained a circumstantial project at the level of tactical measures.

During the conflict, the insult became associated with the accumulated memory of the defense of their 'community', i.e, the perception of their shared interests and boundaries, which they carry with them and which operated at the moment of the conflict in the tomato ranch. They interpreted the insult, not only as personal, as denigrating their own work, but also as an insult to Aticama itself. The fact that the insult came from an external agent, a *caba* who was imposed upon them to the detriment of their own cabo, is another important aspect. The boundaries between external and internal appear to be clearly defined here. However, in my case - also an external agent present - apart from the ambivalent nature in which I am accepted shows how boundaries are established in a way different to how I had intended. There is an unspoken negotiation taking place in which I am assigned the role of reporter, who distills the moment to provide the group with the self-sustaining character it needs. In this case, also, there is a return to the analogy with television practices which may represent what they consider to be an ideal situation.

This case is more explicitly linked to the complexity of a chain of contexts and shows the heavy weight that accumulated local history, like that of Aticama, can have. It also shows how the aggregate is linked to the occasional: the fateful option taken by the grandfathers who joined the *cristiada* movement and the experiences its townsmen bring with them to Aticama, helped to create the necessary climate for the emergence of the current situation of resistance. The group appears to be one that is greatly predisposed to making claims and to self-organizing, but their demands are not confined to the tomato fields of the region. They include also the sphere of influence and the intervention of government institutions and the church as appropriate bodies to address when claiming services for Aticama or expressing their aspirations for land to cultivate.

The problematic changing lifeworlds of tomato workers

In the situations presented, I have used the idea of irony as generating a certain kind of atmosphere that pervades the lifeworlds of workers. I argued that the concept offered a useful sociological tool for interpreting the changing lifeworlds.

I identified the idea of 'contingent utopias' as an outlet or diversion for

workers that come to the surface clothed in a diversity of meanings that almost always result in unexpected and unplanned outcomes, and could even embrace the desire or hope for radical social change. I have analyzed these incidents of irony in terms of the double connotation they express: as masks that people devise and use on specific occasions to protect their human dignity or to devalue an established order; and as projections of an unusual kind of sociological intervention that voices no apocalyptic prophesy or absolute truth, but simply tries to leave open some pages of a book. The use of irony and metaphor as a group phenomenon allowed me to explain how workers share power in order to defy the objectification and alienation of their everyday working situations. Yet this specific kind of force does not represent a strong mechanism. Indeed I prefer to see it as the drip of water which slowly but surely erodes the pitcher.

I have also used the concept broadly to refer to the alternatives and properties that emerge in everyday life situations but which express themselves with a meaning different from that expected. Although there is a 'natural outcome' sustained in working class literature against the abusive conduct of managers or against specific violations of legal regulations and human rights of the workers, the workers' conduct should not be interpreted in a linear, causal manner. Sometimes a very strong response appears provoked by an insignificant offence, or passive and resigned behaviour may exist in the face of what appears a big offence. This observation could lead us to confuse irony and humour, but as Kierkegaard contends, that is not a theoretical problem. Irony is in tune with humour, since irony is an "uninterrupted chain of humour, ... it contains a deeper scepticism that can turn everything head down". There is also a more positive angle to belief in the absurd, and in this way Kierkegaard places his bets on the possibility of constructing a more humane world (Kierkegaard 1965: 341).

This usage coincides with Brown's notion of 'dialectical irony'. Irony teaches that nothing is established as eternal fate and everything can be reversed when overextended. Irony captures this double-edged humanism in that, while it laughs at people's complacent unawareness (or passivity), it also attributes to them the capacity to be aware of their circumstances and to control their fates. To be ironic means that one is conscious that one's own existence is itself a contradiction. This contradiction is precisely the awareness on the one hand of being a finite creature compelled by and subject to the demands of the world and on the other of being a free, responsible being who can never be compelled or subjected to external force. The irony is that one is a contradiction that one exists dialectically' (Hanna 1962: 281-2, quoted by Brown 1a)

Let me now make a connection with Woolgar's use of irony in sociology as the methodical doubt, that is useful for vindicating the search for theoretical

innovation, that emerges from the text as a reflection of reality. According to him, it provides 'a road to re-establish the problem' (Woolgar 1983: 263). In this sense, then, I would question and challenge the reading of meaning in the life projects of workers and their lifeworlds which is founded upon the idea that their behaviour is determined by the ontological division between manual and intellectual work and subject to routine work conditions where it is impossible to act as human thinkers.¹⁹ I want to strip that understanding of any possible definitive or eternal nature.

This conceptual tool - which in the end arises from the preferences and dilemmas of the author of the text - is grounded in an approach to looking at different forms of compliance and different ways of implementing everyday strategies. It never happened, of course, that workers submitted totally to their bosses. Neither did managerial strategies ever achieve perfect control over the workers. Looking back over the interactive sequences, there is an enormous creativity in the way strategies are built and played out as joking and laughter without elaborated stratagems. There is also an intuitive ability to identify the right margins for manoeuvre or to change overstressful conditions, devised and prepared in the field or in the home in the space of a few moments.

These 'flesh and blood' workers are not suicidal people, though surely some of them will engage in strategizing revolutionary moves, despite the disillusionment of current reformists who may consider them as incapable of writing down a 'theory of revolution'. The experience of the workers from Aticama is useful for understanding how histories are embodied and how the fate or good luck of the older generation can reflect the fate or good luck of the new generations. In this sense, 'ironies of life' confront us with situations where there is no total freedom for playing such a game as tomato work. This contradicts the pretensions of a liberal credo. Burawoy concludes that political consensus is manufactured in the labour process without using strong forms of coercion. Hence, there are always new opportunities for players (or workers) to develop strategies that can affect outcomes, but these are not always intended and not entirely under the control of each player. Indeed, variations of outcome are not equal for all players. Thus, if it is true that we make our own history, this is not just as we please. We make history 'behind our backs' through the unintended as well as the intended consequences of our actions (Burawoy 1979: 77-93).

This leads me to consider the 'ordinary' strategizing depicted in the interactive sequences and to the issue of how 'collective behaviour' relates to with the 'planned' strategies of groups of workers. There are at least three different forms of preparing an 'ordinary' strategy which may or may not correspond to different forms of accepting or denying the legitimacy of the

bosses and the plans of the companies: that characterized by the 'cumulative carelessness' displayed in the interlinked humorous sequence of the first case, driven by the acute sense of humour of one of the anonymous workers who becomes, for that moment, leader of the group; that of the 'idealized reconquest' of the tomato ranch in the second case resulting from the initiative of some of the affronted women and seconded by the 'half engineers'; and that made up of the 'everyday claims' of the Aticama group which emerged out of different circumstantial motives and driven by different women and the youngsters of the group.

The non-discursive presentation of these ordinary strategies does not devalue their importance when analyzing how changes in the life world of workers are introduced, and how workers intuitively, actively, but knowledgeably manipulate situations or produce the necessary calculations to share viable alternatives and move the degrees of compliance to the planned or unplanned working situations of the companies.

However, in using these concepts of tactic and strategy, I would like to distance myself from the types of reifications produced by the predominant uses of these concepts within military and managerial contexts (Caplan: 1981). The latter formulations overstress vertical and horizontal relations and are linked to the global and ideological discussions which often function as curtains protecting commercial or technological interests and powers. The social networks of these farm workers move not only in linear directions confronting or relating subordinate people to the masters or viceversa, but in more intertwined and complex sets of relationships. There is also a sizeable repertoire of motives. Human beings concerns do not only revolve around commercial interests, nor around the criterion of maximising profit. Likewise, the triggering force is not only obtaining maximum efficiency of a plan or pure competition, nor is it only power. The meaning of life and pleasure must also have their weight.

There is a trend in sociological theorizing that conceives of changes of the lifeworlds as resulting from extraordinary happenings. Hence, Schutz talks about how the experience of 'special shocks' breaks through the meaning-structure of everyday life (1973: 35). And Habermas designates the same phenomena as 'objective challenges' in the face of which the lifeworld as a whole becomes problematic (1987,II: 401) In contrast, Scott (1986) (see also Long 1989) takes a critical stance against such believers in millennial movements. He suggests the possibility of focusing upon the everyday peasant forms of resistance and on ordinary weapons that introduce changes in the lifeworld.²⁰⁾ The ethnographical material presented throughout this thesis underlines the significance of Scott and Long's insistence on the active force of 'subordinate' actors, and shows why it is important to know the degrees of

complicity and the concrete forms of disobedience that simultaneously lie behind the appearances of a general political consensus.

As a last comment let me now spell out the agenda for discussion in the final two chapters, VII and VIII. Their main concern is to analyze the human agency of tomato workers. To put it more provocatively, I want to reflect on the theoretical implications of my 'anarchist' characterization of the everyday life of tomato workers and its relevance for understanding their changing lifeworlds. This includes a critical examination of a 'rationale' for change. On the basis of the analysis of everyday interactions with workers in the tomato fields, I scrutinize the two poles of the discussion: the one focusing upon the everyday forms of resistance, and the other, the role of the 'extraordinary' as a component of the everyday. I will also appraise Habermas' conceptions of the 'lifeworld' and its assumed corollaries of 'intelligent parties' and 'planned strategies' as the essential components for the production of social change. I will review briefly the ideas on social movements that coincide with this approach. My argument contradicts the view that rationalization of planned change is a necessary condition for the articulation of forms of 'collective' conduct that promote social changes. I also question Habermas' idea of the 'colonization' of lifeworlds and his focus upon the 'objective challenges' that restrict the possibilities for change in the lifeworld to massive, global and revolutionary situations.

In other words, my aim is to provide a 'rationale' for social change which offers new ways of interpreting the contingent 'multiple realities' of everyday life where 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' change is cooked, and a political redefinition of the moral focus of sociologists studying the social conditions of agricultural labourers, which, of course, is not only an issue of pure objectivity.

Notes

1. A recent symposium aiming to analyze the politics of Rorty's liberalist interpretation of irony offers insightful criticisms. Honi Haber (1993: 61-74) accuses Rorty of forgetting to be ironic about his liberalism. She points out that Rorty's pretension for developing a morally neutral and apolitical approach is a theoretical failure which is of no use for dealing with the social or public issues of politics. Martin (1993: 75-81) interprets as 'naive radicalism' some of the arguments of Haber which - in Martin's opinion - remains tied to ideological bias and global contentions without fully corroborating her main criticisms. While recognising as an undeniable contribution, Rorty's insistence that there exist no universal ethical standards and that liberalism is based on a model of tolerance, Martin also criticizes him for being naive and glib about certain policies of the liberal polity. According to Martin, the weakness of Rorty's

position arises from his individualistic approach to 'final vocabularies' that he sees as deriving from self talking and writing without any reference to the social processes that form these vocabularies.

2. Giddens suggests that reflexivity operates only partly at a discursive level: agents know what they do, and why they do it, but their knowledgeability as agents is largely in the form of practical consciousness. Practical consciousness consists of all those things which actors know tacitly in order to "go on" in the contexts of social life, without their being able to give them direct discursive expression (Giddens 1984: XXIII; see also Long 1989: 255). More recently, Giddens insists that 'Discourse is not just what can be expressed propositionally, as stated beliefs. Humour, irony, sarcasm, expletives and even the calculated use of silences may form part of the discursive understanding of social circumstances (Giddens 1990: 314). James Scott (1990: xiii) refers to the hidden transcripts that save researchers in their task of decoding power relations. These 'hidden transcripts' - only occasionally masked in the teeth of the powerful - are, according to Scott, typically expressed in disguised forms such as rumour, gossips, jokes, etc. They operate as vehicles used by subordinated groups to insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understanding of their conduct. Such behaviour is analogous to that used by peasants and slaves who disguised their efforts to thwart material appropriation of their labour production and their property.

3. De Certeau's approach (1984) tries to capture the dynamic and creative essence of daily life. Looking at the active ways of operating among 'ordinary people', he rejects the misconception that regards them as a manipulated mass, inert and passive. For de Certeau, everyday practices (ways of operating or doing things) no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity. On the contrary, such practices always implies social relations determine its terms and not the reverse. Thus, for him, the targets of the analysis should not be the individual subjects and their qualities, but the modes of operation and schematas of action.

4. This is a real challenge which has also been acknowledged by other authors. Goffman states that during the interaction there is not enough time, nor space for discovering underlying reality (1965: 11). Harre Secord (quoted by Habermas) also affirms that we cannot look at people's activities as simply eating, simply working, simply laughing or simply thinking. And Habermas himself contends that no theoretical attitude can make the life-world self evident, since no social scientist can reach the totality of deep knowledge that determines the structure of the life-world (1987,II: 401).

5. Silverstone (1989: 83) quotes a passage from Goody (1977) where he states that writing provides the model for the scientific laboratory, industry, and modern city. Through writing, bodies (in fashion, in car design, in food) are defined, codified and controlled. Through writing, in the production of 'folklore', fables, history, in the sciences of language, and in the definition of 'progress' voices are incorporated into the dominant discourse.

6. During my fieldwork period, I observed at least two extreme situations of this kind: the first, when the boss of the company ordered his representatives to hide groups of workers from the eyes of the external supervisors from the social security office of the federal government. The procedure they chose was to reduce the number of workers on the farm visited to be visited by officials. Workers were translated for a period of two hours to other farms where they did nothing. This was planned to avoid payment of social security for the workers. The second, occurred when somebody stole the medical documents of two workers from the government hospital who had died from inhaling agro-chemicals to avoid indemnity payments. A group of migrant workers headed by a brother of one of the dead workers acted as a leader of the group and organized a massive demonstration against company's actions which finally forced the company not only to produce the records but to pay quick compensation (DC.1988, Rep.154: 14)

7. In a very original manner Nencel describes as "feeling gender speak" the way in which she developed her anthropological practice with prostitutes. She shows how by sharing space, silence and discourse with prostitutes she was able to understand the processes of producing knowledge and constructing identities. She points out the 'tacit acceptance' they use to express nonconformity with the status quo, the fragility of the friendships and relationships, the lack of confidence and the floating alliances. She adds that they create 'momentary illusions' in which the women act and ask to be treated as prospective girlfriends. Paradoxically, although everything seems to be transient, many of the people who are part of this world have been in it for various years. She concludes that without doubt their experiences colour their visions of life (1992: 9-10)

8. Here I follow the idea of 'utopia' by Gorz (1989: 8) who emphasizes that utopia is a vision of the future. In a similar way, my use of 'contingent utopias' denotes the 'momentary illusions' or expectations that people create for projecting better conditions. My use of utopia differs from overcharged conceptualisations which equate utopia with a very idealized and unreachable model of society. Gorz points out that fortunately these models of utopia have collapsed but the problem confronting us is that this collapse is still imprisoning us and limiting the possibilities for clarifying a future outcome. My way of reinterpreting utopia is a plea for a more reachable and creative alternatives.

9. This use coincides with the idea of Ryan (1989:9) who suggests replacing power by force, force being the interaction between different kinds of social energies that establishes the shape of social forms. The advantage of using the concept of force is that it draws attention to the mobile and flexible character of the interaction, while the concept of power suggests a stabilisation of domination. The image of force permits a description of the flows within unequal social arrangements. This means that the possibility of contingency and indeterminacy of direction is still left open.

10. In rural Mexico it is quite common that young males "rob" or 'carry away' women, especially when her parents will not 'give' her to the man in matrimony, or when they have no money for the ceremony.

11. Apte (1992: 67) reflects on how humour influences the listeners, to the degree of creating a sort of common sense humour. Green (1992: 67) observes that riddles are one of the most distinctive forms of group environment and cultural contexts. Riddles (witty questions that one party poses to a respondent who is obliged to offer an apt reply) imply four aspects: 1) a question-an-answer structure; 2) a solution reachable through information contained in the question; 3) shared knowledge, worldview and or tropes between performer and respondents; 4) a slot within a particular tradition and performance context. A riddle is one of the oldest and most culturally widespread of folklore genres. Each cultural context builds its riddles on common practices and objects which are understandable for the group. Commonly riddling is considered as entertainment but others have suggested other purposes such as use for 'cognitive development' to teach children in certain groups, to manage social conflict, to show rules of conduct and manners, to conceptualise the environment for adults as well as children. In some parts of Africa, riddles are used to introduce neophytes to the ritual formulas.

12. Apte (1992: 73) observed that in many societies women seem to be under greater constraint than men in their use or enjoyment of humour. In such societies notions of modesty and passivity associated with what is considered appropriate behaviour for women may lead to their exclusion from public social events at which only men may engage in humour. As women get beyond the reproductive age, however, these restrictions are often relaxed.

13. Sunday was considered an extra working day and thus not compulsory. To motivate workers to assist 'voluntarily' bosses and their representatives offered various kinds of promises.

14. This disbursement for the party implied an extraordinary effort considering the money was collected from people earning only four US dollars per day. In three weeks, they managed to collect 340 dollars for music, drinks and gifts. In addition, everyone contributed to the food.

15. One day of stoppage could mean a big loss for the tomato companies due to the high risks involved in this type of production. In this way the companies could be seen as very vulnerable and the workers powerful. Within the region stoppages are heavily disapproved of. There are some accounts of reprisals against groups or workers who attempt to rebel, and there have been deaths. This is perhaps the reason why some of the workers interpreted actions such as those of the Aticama group as typical working class behaviour. This was also my first impression when I tried to find out what had happened in this first stoppage. Therefore, I was very much interested in the follow-up of the interactive sequence with this group.

16. Hole drilling is one of the heaviest tasks, especially in this part because of the consistency of the earth. Every 70 centimetres, a hole of about 80 centimetres is bored, in which rods are place to hold the strong strings to support the tomato plants. An iron

instrument in the form of a spear which weighs from 5-8 kilos is used for this purpose.

17. They were referring to their participation in the "cristero war" between 1926 and 1929. Most of the people of Aticama had favoured and defended the religious party (considered more conservative and which, in general, took sides with the large landowners), due to their close friendship with a priest who often came to the town. However, after the war - when this party had lost to the agraristas - the people of Aticama became isolated. While other groups that had fought on the side of the government received land, they did not.

18. There is a custom in Mexican villages like Aticama for women to go to the tortilla mill or shop, early in the morning, everyday, to get tortillas or the maize dough to make them. This is thus a very common place to talk and meet.

19. see Braverman (1982: 150) and Astorga Lira (1985: 118)

20. Scott speaks about the 'vast aggregation' of petty acts like foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on that made possible the big ones, just as millions of autozoom polyps create, willy-nilly a coral reef. The fact that most subordinate classes are after all far less interested in changing the larger structures of the state and the law, (it is the system working) is not enough to deny the potential for the change of lifeworld which poses the ordinary strategies (conceived by Long) used by people who employ them to extract what they can from the 'system' or 'patron' (Scott 1986: xvi and xvii; Long 1989: 256).

CHAPTER VII

EXPLORING POINTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE: A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

The precise conditions of social change involving individuals and collectivities, in whatever location or unit of analysis and despite alleged technological and scientific developments, are still beyond the predictive powers of the theoretical apparatus of the social sciences. In the postmodern debate, the character assigned to social science is consistent with a relativistic profile which acknowledges that social change no longer conveys a universal image or unitary explanation but a multiplicity of images and explanations, where different changes continuously interact and interweave in concrete scenarios. Thus, have we have encountered in this thesis, the problem to be tackled in analyzing the changes occurring in the everyday work and domestic lives of tomato workers consists neither in measuring the scale of change, nor its quality or intensity (whether these processes be seen as revolutionary, evolutionary, ordinary or extraordinary). Nor is it a question of identifying privileged locations, domains, or issues for observing change, since change presents itself in different shapes and sizes, occurs in all locations and covers all aspects of life. The problem lies in the conceptual apparatus for understanding and pinning down the meanings of change, which in this specific case requires getting to grips with the lives of agricultural workers.

So, what is at the stake is developing a 'rationale for change', that effectively addresses the uncertainties and subjectivities inherent in situations of social change. Flexible ways of reflecting is a distinctive feature of 'good social science', that, in my opinion, should be committed to a 'soft' style which takes account not only of purposeful strategic action but also includes an understanding of the emotional and affective dimensions of the social actor, as Turner (1992) argues when he makes a plea for a recognition of the full *embodiment* of social action. Maybe this is seen to be less powerful in logical deductive terms than the pretensions of the exact or 'hard' sciences, but it should be an important differentiating element of the social sciences. Thus, in an attempt to explicate a 'rationale' for analyzing social change, this chapter aims to develop an argument to counter the reiterative accusation of Randall

Collins that micro-sociologists "[are] quite technical empirical researchers with an apolitical programme.. [who become] some kind of anarchist radicals" (1992: 79). The chapter is grounded in a dialogue between my own ethnographic reflections and the existing sociological literature, that deals specifically with agricultural labourers and the labour process.

The first section reviews theories of change of the lifeworld such as the 'metatheory' of Habermas (1984), and that of social movements. I will establish some particular relations between these 'theoretical models' and narratives of the struggles of agricultural workers and my own ethnographic material, including some points of discussion about the character of structural change. The second section deals with the paradigmatic concept of the agricultural labour process which is still presented as the analytical model for studying working circumstances. This is a 'straitjacket' scheme derived from the industrial shop floor and adapted to the rural environment, with the result that the agricultural labour process becomes not the twin but the bastard brother of the industrial labour process. The aim of this section is to emphasize the need for a more flexible analysis of working circumstances. A last section summarizes, in a final discussion, the issues of the politics of tomato work raised in previous chapters. This section develops more fully a counter argument to Collins criticisms and reviews also the 'infratheoretical'¹⁾ approach to social change of Scott (1985; 1990). Finally, I make some concluding remarks about the implications of these discussions for the changing lifeworlds of tomato workers.

Rethinking agrarian and social change

Verena Stölcke in her study of Brazilian workers (1988: 230-1) perhaps offers the most penetrating picture in the literature of how workers experience socio-economic change and how this change is informed not only by material facts but also by previous socio-economic circumstances and by the ideological and cultural values attached to them. She stresses how changing situations have different meanings for the members of workers' families, and she goes into depth on how the models and traditions of the family are used to reinforce exploitative practices. She also emphasizes that workers experience changing socio-economic production relations not as autonomous individuals, but as social actors enmeshed in relationships crucially shaped by power differentials and influenced by gender divisions within and outside the household.

However, although her description is quite exceptional, she is still in tune with a literature on agricultural workers which is characterized by a political

stance that assumes that workers are powerless and economically disadvantaged in relation to farmers acting as employers and managers of companies. This literature concurs with a perspective that mainly takes, as the meaning of social change, the economic aspect which determines the political or at least stresses the entanglement of economics with politics, using as indicators such visible changes as increased wages, better housing, improvements in human rights and social security, and patterns of rural socio-economic life. Such social changes are often depicted as resulting from important revindicative struggle by workers, as the effect of the application of government regulations, as concessions effected by progressive measures, as shifts introduced by technological innovations or modifications in the working schedules and as the patterns put into motion by new economic practices. Changes are also frequently interpreted as fatalities provoked by external forces belonging to the capitalist system, or they are untheorised as the result of the good will of some exceptional boss.

In the literature pertaining to agricultural workers there is no detailed account of how workers themselves conceptualize and operationalize strategies of social change. None of the explanations of change offered seem to believe in the possibility that workers can create, themselves, the conditions to improve substantially their life conditions and to free themselves as a sector or social group from the situation of domination in which they are immersed. In fact, what is stressed is the complexity of prevalent forms of domination and the weakness of the unions, considered to be the main institutional body of agricultural workers. There is a contradiction here. On the one hand, there are authors - above all those in favour of workers' social movements who constitute the majority studying Mexican cases - who claim that the self-liberating efforts by workers are the only effective means to obtain real improvements in the life conditions of workers (Posadas and Garcia, 1986), and on the other, authors such as Danzinger (1988: 6-11) who, studying the situation of farm workers in Britain where apparently the union is seen as more organized and relatively strong, argues that without substantial improvements in material living conditions one cannot talk about real change. For Danzinger the real amelioration in life conditions will only happen when a coalition of social forces, mostly external to the workers' environment, support the social claims for such an improvement. He visualizes that this coalition of forces in favour of agricultural workers would include the intervention of government agencies and parliamentarians implementing legal and institutional solutions.

Mexican experiences of workers' movements (Paré 1979; and Grammont et.al. 1986) stress that workers' struggles are essentially revindicative and effective in avoiding the bad treatment and hindrances to work such as transport, but less effective in establishing better salaries and housing. In

Chapters IV and VI, I observed a similar pattern in the aftermath of spontaneous local mobilizations of workers who managed to gain these kinds of benefits. Posadas and Garcia (1986) emphasize that under Mexican conditions the most important political issue is to make more public how agricultural workers are exploited. They also believe that the solution to the improvement of the life conditions' of workers resides in the consolidation of their independent organizations, headed by an intelligent group who can drive workers' struggles without egotistical interests, and who can develop strategies and alliances with other working classes and 'progressive' social forces capable of defying the hegemony of the capitalist system. In this vein, Danzinger, as well as Posadas and Garcia, offer clear examples of what I called in Chapter VI 'enlightenment strategies' and 'intelligent parties', an issue to which I will return below.

It can be argued, therefore, that the literature on agricultural workers is still dominated by a structuralist and systemic approach which falls short in interpreting social change within everyday life circumstances. As Long emphasized as long ago as 1968, in his study of social change in a rural Zambian community, a structuralist approach 'cannot adequately deal with the problem of how change is generated' (1968: 9). Taking as an analytical perspective the dynamics of the everyday working life of tomato workers, i.e. considering what workers do and not what they should do, implies rejecting the idea that if a system of exploitation cannot be totally suppressed then nothing analytically worthwhile can be said about changes occurring in workers' everyday lives. Hence, in this chapter my option is to appraise some of the theoretical foundations and concepts about social change in the light of my own ethnographic reflections in order to arrive at a more concrete way of looking at the points of change within dynamic social processes and to see how changes are generated.

How lifeworlds change

Let me begin by discussing theories that take as their foundation the notion of 'intelligent parties' and 'enlightening strategies'. I limit my scope to some illustrative examples, since it would be impossible here to cover all the many theories and conceptions of this kind. The fact is, that after the experiences of the social movements of 1968, academics and political activists from different continents and conditions turned to a discussion which focused on the more abstract theories such as those of Touraine (1981) on social movements, and Habermas' (1987) critical theory of communicative action.

Touraine's conceptualisation of social movements as the new motor of social change is a response to the theoretical and political impasse resulting from the paralysis of oppositional institutions such as the political parties and labour unions of the left that were practically ignored or bypassed during the mobilisations of students in 1968. With the concept of social movement, Touraine tries to stress more flexible organizing principles, where the objective is not the conquest of power and the breaking of the system as a whole, but to meet the specific demands of 'true adversaries'. In the framework of a social movement, a convergence of alliances and not a homogeneous unification is imaginable. Touraine (1981: 77) defines a social movement as the 'organized collective behaviour of a class actor struggling against his class adversary for the social control of historicity in a concrete community'. Nevertheless certain shortcomings and rigidities remain in Touraine's idea of social movement since his schematic model is tied to a dichotomized image of society.

Virginia Vargas (1991: 7-15) has recently reinterpreted what she calls 'Latin American new social movements' and particularly women's movements. She emphasizes that 'these social movements make evident the complexity of social dynamics, highlighting the existence of many more areas of conflict than those related to social class and economics'. She shows also the multiplicity of social subjects involved and not just those from a privileged class. However, although the specific cases she describes undoubtedly question radically the way societies are structured and, as she suggests, open new spaces for analysis and discussion, this does not mean that her approach is not tainted with a similar vanguardist approach. Indeed the alternative institutional model for change she reformulates remains theoretically problematic for understanding social changes occurring in groups inside and outside such movements.

Habermas has developed a more complicated and systematic way of defining social change in his theory of communicative action, though I cannot here discuss exhaustively the way he addresses social change. I approach his theory with a more specific purpose in mind. As I mentioned in Chapter VI, we need to make explicit why Habermas' approach cannot adequately deal with situations of radical contingency and fragmentation such as those presented in the case of tomato workers and tomato companies. We should also explore why he restricts changes within the lifeworld to those responding to 'objective challenges' prompted by 'enlightening strategies' carried out by 'intelligent parties'. In a critical assessment of Habermas' complicated theory I will make alliance with authors such as Ryan (1989) and Seur (1992) who have already exposed some of Habermas' shortcomings.

Habermas argues that to grasp analytically the changing processes occurring within the lifeworld it is necessary to develop a metatheoretical operation. He

starts with Schutz' notion of lifeworld and reinterprets it as the context that always remains in the background, representing unproblematic common convictions that are taken as guaranteed (1987: 120). However, he dichotomizes the lifeworld when he simultaneously confuses it either with society in the broad sense or with an area of social life that can be rationalized and mediatized. Even when he accepts that some fragmentations or circumstantial representations within the lifeworld may occur, he perceives these as subordinated to the whole. This means that he sees them as incidents emerging in the narrative presentation of historical events and social circumstances, but he persistently denies their theoretical relevance. In this sense, although he recognizes that situations can change within the lifeworld, he establishes limits in the lifeworld that cannot be transcended. Ryan (1989: 28) criticizes this holistic conception as 'romantic metaphysics' grounded in a model of rationalization which implies a separation of abstract reason from empirical experience.

What is implicit in Habermas' version is an assumption of modernity and political order that aims to stabilize and integrate around the ever-prevailing capitalist system. For Habermas, money, markets, media and power are self-contained entities carried out by rational institutions (the system 'working out there') that can regulate and intrude into the lifeworld provoking a process of colonization by which, for example, the family may become subject to legal supervision or schools become subject to increased bureaucratic administration (Ryan 1989). But, of course, this can result in reification. One can take as a point of specific enquiry each of these entities and come to the conclusion that there are enormous variations of meaning and representation even though they are affected by the same so-called macro trends. In this thesis I have argued repeatedly that power is not a self-contained entity. More specifically, Chapter V affirms the view that power has no explanatory capacity in itself, but rather has to be explained. This approach runs counter Habermas' model.

For Habermas systems are neither contingent and material nor socially and historically constructed, but theoretically immanent and governed by agents who have learned to be rational and to see rationality in the world. To some extent, he understands rational as being able to transcend contingencies, and in this sense, Habermas' conceptualization of lifeworld is a teleological one which looks at the transcendental point of significance beyond the trivia of everyday situations and locates this significance outside the malleable empirical contingencies of social struggle. Habermas is logical in perceiving actors as macro in the same sense that agency is defined by rationality and rationality cannot secure a desired vision of social order without embracing a metatheoretical significance.

The constructed 'social order' resulting from Habermas' conception is an

imposition contradicting physicality and emotionality, and this is why Habermas' perspective is always aligned with political ideals of social democratic forms of governance by an elite of rationalist representatives who know better than the people what the people should want (Ryan 1989: 31). Consistent with this is the belief that the task of changing or breaking down a 'social order' such as that conceived by Habermas can only be carried out by organized intelligent parties able to understand how the system as a whole operates. Intelligent parties appear also as entities superior to non-rational workers who must accept the labour process organized by management. As a consequence he also attributes to intelligent parties the role of subsuming the material energies of exploited groups in the same way that reason must subsume the contingencies of material feelings like needs and desires.

Han Seur (1992: 17) reinterprets Habermas' theory by distinguishing overlapping personal lifeworlds and shared lifeworlds. He illustrates this from his own research in Nchimishi, a rural neighbourhood in central Zambia, where 'individuals assume that they share part of their personal lifeworlds with specific others', but where 'some knowledge (for instance the language, agricultural knowledge and knowledge related to kinship categories), values, norms and expressions were indeed seen as shared by almost all inhabitants'. From this standpoint, he offers a flexible interpretation of the way lifeworlds change (1992: 23): he writes 'it is through actions (including statements) that an actor intentionally or unintentionally constantly alters and/or recreates the external world that surrounds him. Therefore it is through motivated or unmotivated actions and the perception of these actions by others that an actor, intentionally or unintentionally, knowingly or unknowingly, becomes (at least temporarily) part of the personal lifeworld of other actors, in this way playing a role in recreating and changing their lifeworld'.

The issue of analyzing the boundaries of personal and shared lifeworlds is a complex one and the precise demarcation of these boundaries is perhaps impossible. As Seur contends:

'at any given moment, a local community may consist of an indefinite number of shared lifeworlds. That is, individuals and groups may assume they share stocks of knowledge, practices, material resources, values, norms, discourses and expressions with a wide range of other individuals or groups. This means that during every communicative action an actor may for some reason feel the need to demarcate the boundary of the lifeworld s/he assumes s/he shares with others, or the boundaries between this shared lifeworld and what s/he considers to be other lifeworlds' (1992: 19).

The 'structural constraints' that obscure or enlighten what is changing

The ethnographical narratives in Chapters II, V and VI, describe how the lifeworlds of tomato workers are fragmented but always interlocked. Personal and shared lifeworlds are intricately embodied in the everyday life of people and expressed through impure and heterogeneous ideological phrases that always exist in relation to the ideologies of the others (Eagleton 1991)²⁾. For that reason what is intriguing in studying changing lifeworlds are the problematic points of 'causality' which researcher and researched may establish for connecting these ideological expressions grounded in the contingent circumstances of daily interactions (such as those of tomato workers in tomato work) with the multiplicity of elicited orders of everyday experience. This leads one to pay attention to the relationships of structure and action (contexts and actors) in this exploration of changing lifeworlds, and to how the meaning of change is obscured or enlightened by certain structural constraints.

A typical example of a structural constraint (sometimes expressed as ironic conditions) underlying the life circumstances of many of the workers with whom I interacted³⁾ is the fact that they cannot afford land or the other resources needed to cultivate (such as social security, credit and a profitable harvest). However, this is only one way of looking at such a constraint. Looked at more positively, it could be said that such a constraint may prompt or enable some to develop a 'contingent utopia', i.e. to become *ejidatarios* or small farmers and embrace the dream of being more independent and doing something on their own means, though it is clear that only a few of these workers will achieve this successfully. Thus, structural constraints are twofold⁴⁾ and stressing either their constraining or enabling character obscures or simplifies the meaning of change by eliminating other possibilities, by interrupting the dynamic flux of changing circumstances or reducing the process to a single chain of cause and effect.

This question of understanding the dynamics of social change has been tackled in another way, i.e. by analyzing the relationships between the 'intended' and 'unintended' consequences⁵⁾ of social action.

The notion of 'unintended consequences' is an enigmatic one (Elster 1990: 133) and may, ironically, not be so useful for clarifying fieldwork strategies. Behind this notion lies a good deal of ambiguity and, at the end of the day, the notion may be unsatisfactory because it continues with a dichotomised view which does not clarify much. As Elster insists, the problem remains in defining precisely what is intended or unintended and for whom, and the terms can easily be used as an excuse for unclear or circular. Boudon (1990) tries to sort out the analytical weakness of a circular explanation often implied in the

concept of unintended consequences by using 'reference group theory'. He analyzes the specific problem of the distribution of educational opportunities and why more opportunities are concentrated in the hands of youngsters from a higher class, and are less accessible to youngsters from a lower class. The fact that this advantage can be argued as a powerful differential for determining the status of people is puzzling for him but he claims that it cannot be used to argue that 'people are led by forces unconsciously regulating their level of aspiration, or simply to accept the idea that the level of aspiration is mechanically produced by the social environment' (Boudon 1990: 124-5).

Of course, we can interpret the condition of landlessness as also a circumstance affected by the unintended consequences of the actions of former *hacienda peones* or other predecessors of the tomato workers. As I commented in Chapter VI, when dealing with the Aticama group of workers, a proper reading of their experiences leads one to conclude that the involvement of the majority of the heads of family in the army of *cristeros*, which supported the church and landowners against the *agraristas*, could be interpreted as the cause of the repeated blocking of their attempts to obtain land. So long as they continued to be landless some connection could be established between these events and outcomes. However, although the explanation might seem to be plausible, there is still a difficulty - and maybe an irresolvable one - in the sense that the precise connections in the chain of actions stretching from the past to the present can never be assumed and proven beyond doubt. Nor is it possible to produce a general explanation that would hold for all people from Aticama.

The fact is that it is impossible to disentangle unintended from intended consequences (past and present). To take the condition of being landless as an historical fact derived from the unintended outcomes of ancestors, simply is not sufficient for explaining the present-day struggles of people from Aticama to obtain access to land, since they are driven to seek land for many reasons and in many ways. In fact, there remains the possibility that experiences other than historical antecedents can be more important. The tomato workers of Aticama represent diverse social interests that are interwoven in a multiplicity of ways with the local events of Autlán and Aticama.

The Aticama tomato workers are differentiated by age, gender, class, religious beliefs, reputation and power. In addition, their social actions combine domestic and working conditions, thus cutting across different social domains. Events such as weddings, stoppages, migration and parties become meaningful within specific contexts and in relation to organizing practices and social interests both before and after the particular events. The case of the stoppage, for example, shows how the creation and maintenance of kinship ties and political networks emanating from Aticama encouraged 'communal' solidarity

amongst the group of workers when engaged in conflict with the management. This solidarity was not casual and formed part of an ongoing tactical learning process for coping with scarcity of resources or the remoteness of their small village. These tactical performances - each with their own specificity - were relevant for understanding the ways in which tomato workers from Aticama extracted certain benefits from the company.

Thus the social behaviour and lifeworlds of tomato workers cannot be grasped simply by isolating structural conditions and constraints but requires a fine-grained analysis of the ongoing dynamics and intricacies of everyday life - of the small and 'ordinary', the 'trivial' and routine. As I emphasized when discussing the condition of 'landlessness', the meaning and significance of such 'structural' features are situationally grounded and do not possess a general trans-situational value. Indeed, as Long and van der Ploeg (1992: 22) argue, it is more promising theoretically to understand the structural features of everyday life as a fluid set of emergent properties that result from the interactions, negotiations and social struggles where people are prompted to search for some means for survival, and not to consider that these people live in a definitively fixed condition which can only be effectively changed by large-scale political action. This has not only theoretical but practical implications. For example, faced with the contingent and uncertain nature of the tomato industry in the region (which in fact in 1993 is in a state of collapse), it would be absurd to claim permanent employment for all tomato workers, or to consider tomato work as the ideal solution for making a living or as an obligatory stage in the lives of all landless people from the region. The central challenge for the sociologist is to understand how workers and their families live under the conditions they face and do so with many purposes in mind, managing to survive and advance their interests and struggling to secure better living conditions within the difficult circumstances of tomato work.

The 'enlightenment' theory of the labour process

In the literature on agricultural and industrial workers there is a paradigmatic tradition focusing upon the labour process which promises to define the ideas and practices that empower workers and their organizations - an ambitious, and obviously political goal. Anything less undermines the radical intent of this tradition.

Authors such as Thompson (1989) conceive labour process concepts as tools with which to unlock the problems of the changing nature of work and for understanding behaviour in the work place. For Littler (1990), the theory is a

way of examining the ultimate function of management and of revealing how workers' abilities are converted into capital accumulation. He also argues that the labour process is a flexible conceptualization which can come bring order to the great variety of economic and social activities occurring in the work place.

The theory of labour process has been considered useful for analysing agricultural practices and more particularly agro-industrial management (including the tomato industry). Anne Lacroix (1981)⁶ tried to develop a concept specifically of the agricultural labour process. Following Marx's general schema of labour process, she underlines the peculiarities of the agricultural, as against the industrial labour process: Given the fact that labour time does not coincide with production time and given the special nature of the means of production she argues that there is more flexibility and autonomy in the organization of work, and unlike in the industrial process, workers have the ability to transform the nature of the production process.

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (1990: 26) takes a similar view, but emphasises the extent to which the modern agricultural labour process becomes part of a wider network of technical and economic relations. Nevertheless he does not go as far as Friedland and Barton who argue that modern agriculture is transformed into a genuine 'factory in the field' due to the technological changes introduced (1976: 40-1), and who conclude that the essential feature of tomato production (here they have in mind the Californian situation) is very much like that found in industrial operations. Paradoxically, however, Friedland and Barton acknowledge difficulties with their 'factory in the field' argument since they also accept the influence that kinship and friendship networks have on the labour process among commercial farms.

Recently there has been an increasing degree of critical revision (Knights and Willmott 1990) calling for a new theoretical view to the extent that, unlike Marx's original formulation, there is now no clear conception of the labour process itself nor of its fundamental elements (Littler 1990: 77). For example, Thompson (1989: 101-5) recognizes that labour process analysis cannot provide a predictive theory concerning the behaviour of employers and workers based on identifiable sets of interests generated within production. He also acknowledges the contradictory character of this conceptual apparatus when he affirms that, although managers are 'global agents' of capital, this does not imply that at an empirical level there are no contradictions within that role, or between strata or types of management. He ends by recommending a focus on human agency which cannot simply be reduced to the adding up of labour units nor to the 'discovery' of new modes of production. He points to the importance of choices made within structural constraints. Consequently, he proposes that

the study of changes in the labour process have to be established empirically rather than read off from general categories.

Of course it would be unfair to conclude that the work based on labour process theory was valueless as suggested by some sceptics of the paradigm. Baudrillard (1975) helps clarify one of the weaker points in the theory of labour process, i.e. its association with the Marxist theory of value. He argues that Marx essentially failed because he took for granted contemporary concepts of political economy. He accuses Marx of unsuccessfully differentiating between use and exchange value and suggests that his interrelated notions of 'abstract' and 'concrete' labour are mirror images of universal western categories embracing a rationalistic notion of labour and social wealth taken as universals. In other words, Marx takes labour as a human essence. The distinction between abstract and concrete labour is insufficient to deal theoretically with labour practices which are not considered essentials. Thus in the end Marx passes the fact of this failure to the workers, stressing that through the labour power of workers a radical alternative to the present system would appear. But this never happened.

So, one might ask, if the theory is not useful for understanding labour practices in their full sense and not useful for empowering workers' organizations, what remains of this tradition of research in sociology? Certainly it no longer offers a general model of explanation. A combination of using the concepts in a more flexible way and reshaping them by grounding them empirically may perhaps refresh the critical lens of the paradigm for analysing working situations.

Some preoccupations of this tradition encourage a more critical scrutiny. One such preoccupation is the question of what exploitation might mean and whether in fact exploitation can ever be the same twice running. One way to reassess the question of current power mechanisms and techniques is to examine the specific meaning of the complexities involved, i.e. to examine the interconnections between the different domains and issues that cut across working scenarios. The novelty of the discontinuous, or perhaps the progressive and transformative features of situations may offer a dynamic, but even then the problem remains a complex one, where differences of power and political disadvantage constantly but asymmetrically refurbish and deprive the workers of opportunities. Another point of study is to look at how these asymmetries are created.

A second preoccupation is the importance of technological and external changes. But again, a major reconsideration of the meanings and interactions of local actors dealing with these changes is required (in Chapter V, I show the ambivalent circumstances of such situations of technological change). This means that concrete patterns such as systems of cultivation, the introduction of

new equipment and other innovations, property regimes and regulations, and government policy changes have to be considered not purely in formal terms but as flexible patterns reshaped by the local actors involved.

In reshaping concepts of the labour process a variety of situations and combinations must be explored, such as different ways of disciplining or the self-disciplining workers, whether in domestic unwaged or waged work. The distinctiveness of working situations combine with other specific circumstances of gender, class and age resulting from these situations. This was the perspective I followed in describing working circumstances in Chapter III.

The 'anarchism' of micro-sociology

In the last section of Chapter VI, I explored how the use of irony allowed me to interpret changes in the lifeworlds of tomato workers more optimistically and to contradict theoretical positions which ignored the possibility that tomato workers can develop their own strategies for change. In the argument that follows I focus on what the verbal and contingent strategies of tomato workers mean in political terms and how politics embodies domains and issues where company and worker strategies intertwine.

My argument, based on the study of everyday life, is that analysis at the micro level allows one to understand issues of politics, stratification (power differentials), social conflict and local movements, showing how, without pretending to elaborate these as objective and universal phenomena, these apply in specific circumstances.

I have referred also to the extensive repertoire of motives involved in which pleasure and joking activities play an important role. For believers in a social science adhering to a rational model, the collective practices of irony described in Chapter VI may represent 'less serious' data which may also be interpreted as individualistic, atomistic or anarchistic, and thus of less value sociologically. However, by simultaneously including past experiences, one can show how individual tomato workers do not act in a social vacuum. I believe that their behaviour always reflects wider spatial and temporal social processes.

Dealing with the complexities involved in micro situations, I identified circumstances where the ordinary intertwines with the extraordinary. Hence we should not, as Danzinger (1998: 81) does - studying the situation of agricultural labourers in Britain from 1920 to 1950 -, take social protests such as arson, theft from employers' stocks accompanied by hostile letters, the destruction of fences and the deliberate maiming of animals, as 'highly individualistic forms'. Danzinger concludes that such ways of protesting neither succeed in gaining

better living conditions for workers nor in consolidating the organization of workers.

Collins (1992)⁷ takes this point further, criticizing ethnomethodology and certain types of micro-sociology which, in his opinion, misinterpret how change comes about. He accuses both political conservatism and romanticism for their inclination to conceive of social change as driven by a cognitive schema where change is episodic and controlled within the framework of the normality of everyday life. In contrast, my ethnographic material shows a constant preoccupation to avoid falling into a deterministic interpretation of what is assessed as changing circumstances. Yet even though my analytical results can offer, only for fleeting moments, a picture of workers transformed from 'dominated' into 'the dominant', this was reason enough to examine more critically the political and theoretical implications. This emphasis allowed me to examine a variety of images of tomato workers, where everyday struggles threw into question all that which might be taken as continuing domination in the labour process. These struggles, endeavours and initiatives of workers - not only the skillful or circumstantially powerful in the companies - highlight the fragile ways of achieving control in working circumstances, and reveals at the same time the instability of playing games of power, authority and knowledge.

Hence the situations introduced in previous chapters, where tomato workers such as Rogelio, Polo, Alejandro (Chapter III), Ricardo and Chimino (Chapter V) and the groups from Aticama, the greenhouse workers of the Cobras Company and the group of jokers (Chapter VI) play a major role, present to us tomato workers who can exert power and counterpower not as a phantasy (that Collins judges to be the typical outcome of the ethnomethodologist) but as an effective way of forcing the company to make a complete shift in its organizing scheme, such it did in the case of the instated worker in Chapter V, and the stoppage by the Aticama group in Chapter VI. Or, to put it more provocatively, the phantasies ('contingent utopias') of tomato workers allow us to look beyond to the different status quos of tomato work. Without these images the ever cautious behaviour of company bosses and managers (who acknowledge the unpredictability of worker's behaviour) in adopting a flexible strategy is not readily understood.

Shortcomings within Scott's 'infratheory' of social change

A point on which I would agree with Collins is the insistence that the 'extraordinary' is also part and expression of the ordinary life of people. This implies, however, that it has to be understood in its local circumstances and not

necessarily as a sort of an alternative model of society. This point is critical for assessing Scott's 'infratheory' of social change which attempts to build a systematic model for grasping the 'everyday forms of resistance of subaltern groups'. Scott's attempt, I believe, does not escape from circular reasoning.

Analyzing Scott's (1985, 1990) perspective in more detail, I conclude that his approach - grounded in everyday forms of resistance viewed as a permanent process of change - is misleading if it is extrapolated to become a general explanatory model wherein ordinary situations are used to explain and replace revolutionary transformations. In fact Scott's approach suggests a preference for a certain type, scope and quality of change namely the ordinary and undramatic. Although he cannot be accused of deliberately choosing the 'normal' or 'less defiant' events, since no-one can predict precisely when particular events will happen, there remains a problem in the meaning and interpretation he attributes to 'small' and highly specific events or chains of events. Indeed, if it is true that 'revolutions' or 'important conflicts' are exaggerated by presenting some events as generalized for the whole nation and involving masses of people mobilized on behalf of some strategy of change⁸, then it is no less true that the fleeting downturn or momentary collapse of the political system, characteristic of revolutionary episodes, also develops in extensive/intensive everyday situations. This means specifically that 'extraordinary circumstances' underlie the struggle of ordinary people, who perhaps become more polarized for a while in defending their trivial interests and ideas. In the end, revolutionary processes represent specific circumstances developed when an increase in a conflictive situation develops, and in this respect the dimensions, quality and urgency of changes are altered by compelling demands and unexpected outcomes.

Hobsbawn and Rudé (1969) interestingly reinterpret from the perspective of everyday life - the story of Don Luis in Chapter VI also makes the same point - the massive riots developed by agricultural workers in England around 1830. The multiple forms of everyday resistance such as arson, threatening letters, inflammatory hand bills and posters, robbery, wages meetings, the destruction of different types of machinery, all of which in fact could have been described as encompassing some 'big moves' or massive expressions, in fact occurred on only two or three occasions. In most cases these various activities were aimed at a single goal: to attain a minimum living wage and, in specific localities, to end rural unemployment (1971: 195). Thus, in contextually different historical situations, the severe conflicts and revolutions that sometimes happened were intricately built upon infinitesimal and heterogeneous ways of resisting.

Thus there is a double invocation to principle in the model of 'infrapolitics' by Scott: first, that the powerful must always be dominant and persistently

maintain command in the power network, otherwise the systematic approach to everyday forms of resistance (developed by the dominated) would be unsuitable and perhaps less suggestive; and second, that the subaltern classes as presented by Scott must consist of some kind of homogeneity, at least in the way they constantly share a common strategy of subversion.

It could be argued that some parts of my ethnographic narrative may also convey a similar tone, for instance, the subversive network around the reinstated worker in Chapter V. However, I present the case as a particular circumstance embracing localized practices, and not as an example of an extended pattern or custom. In the same chapter, I offer the picture in working situations of games of power in which obscuring and securing the interests of the company and 'official truths' intertwine with workers' images of power and skills. Hence one can conclude that the ways in which workers express their consent in working situations represent more complicated forms of political arrangement. This perspective is indeed confirmed by the descriptions of the complexities involved in working scenarios in Chapter III and in the three situations presented in Chapter VI. In this way, the definition of tasks reveals implicitly shared values of work expressed both by bosses and workers that are sometimes difficult to disentangle. As Marx rightly emphasized, 'workers accept with 'good reasons' their exploitation' (quoted in Boudon 1992: 124) and this means that they internalize and translate the reasoning of capitalists into their own words and worlds and that they do so by using different combinations which, willingly or unwillingly, express present and past consequences of their social actions.

Rethinking the ethics and politics of tomato work

At this stage I have to declare with some satisfaction that my micro sociological experience has allowed me to identify myself, in some respects, with the scepticism of tomato workers' views on politics (i.e. with the meanings they assign to political issues, activities and rhetorics (such as Rogelio and the students of Chapter II)), which I regard with mixed feelings of realism, cynicism and mistrust (see also Held 1989: 243-47).

Let me start by explaining some issues related to ethics as they present themselves in their local contexts and in the literature. Worker studies are full of moral considerations such as the issues of justice or social redistribution, or, as viewed from another angle, the equal/unequal access to material, economic, social and political resources. These are also most commonly viewed in a negative way as the alienation and exploitation of workers. However, looking

at these issues in relation to particular local conditions, one begins to question the utility of an ideal model of solutions that can never fit with such specific conditions

In Chapter IV, I described the operation of the tomato industry as characterized by changing relationships between workers, managers and bosses, in an environment of relativistic legality and morality. My description emphasized the complicated intersection of local and external (global and transnational) practices and alliances which shape, and are shaped by, the constitution of various states of political equilibrium in which the rights, demands and interests of workers, managers and other parties are constantly negotiated. In Chapter VI, I reflected more specifically on the shared collective identities of workers and companies as characterized by the contingent and uncertain nature of tomato work (enterprises 'on wheels' and workers 'always on the move') and how this leads to a legal and moral relativism where agents of government justify a 'non-interventionist policy' because of the provisionality of tomato work.

The contingent nature of tomato work and workers exhibits complex ethical problems which are not easy to tackle with general formulas. In any case what is at stake is the moral authority attributed to whatever institution or social actor might effectively intervene in such situations to dictate solutions as the neutral arbiter. Although the circumstances under analysis are always changing, these circumstances have, nevertheless, to be thought of within specific symbolic boundaries in which people act in such a way as to avoid extreme conditions of desperation. Thus, unsatisfactory agreements on low salaries or the acceptance of poor housing conditions, which might appear hopeless, are interpreted as tolerable if they avoid (if only for a while) massive and socially explosive unemployment within a region, which could result in the total bankruptcy of the tomato industry.

Formulas for moral or legal solutions cannot wait for better moments or ideal conditions to be fabricated. Faced with the improbability of a better life for everybody and in order to prevent the deteriorating effects produced by productive hindrances that attempt to suppress the tomato industry in the region, compliance with less so as to continue coping with family needs and to boost the regional economy is sometimes the more appropriate response. Thus, it is difficult to make a diagnosis and to invoke general criteria for interpreting a progressive attitude that favours the living conditions of workers and preserves local resources and the environment. When salary negotiations or other economic demands occur, radical modifications are not expected and are relegated to extreme circumstances. Negotiations run within two overt routes: those which look to points of consensus between strategies of survival and

strategies of quick profit; and those which look at new possibilities for managing scarce resources of various kinds (credit, land, etc). Meanwhile, solutions must take account of the consequences produced by an intensive style of tomato production (such as land and water degradation, and pollution). The conditions sometimes reach points at which the margins for compromise are impossible and the interests of one of the parties threaten to subsume and eventually suppress the other.

To describe such a situation of contingency is, in a way, to assert that the ethics of tomato work are based on the analysis of particular cases privileging the political realism of a negotiated settlement. However, the literature has commonly regarded the operation of the tomato industry in particular regional contexts as a sort of immoral depredator of local resources in the service of transnational and external agents who always procure more economic benefits than local agents. From this standpoint, the description of a casuistic morality cannot avoid being judged as tolerant for tacitly accepting practices of injustice and exploitation without doing intellectual battle against transnational interests. Of course, issues such as the ecological damage to the local environment, the continuous exhaustion of local resources such as land, capital, labour, 'local knowledge' and skills are important questions but they can all be discussed from this standpoint, and examined in the local context.

The strength of micro-sociology

Let me now suggest a way forward in this battle, starting precisely from micro-sociological situations. Poor results in the amelioration of workers' conditions in more than a hundred years of legislation and policy implementation in, for instance, the United States (a circumstance mentioned by Friedland and Barton 1976: 42), or similar conditions in the British context described by Newby and Danzinger, can hardly reinforce the belief that social change will come through effective intervention by outside organizations and government bodies. This leads to increased doubt in an institutional approach to social change and to the realization that the possibilities for change cannot be created in an ideal vacuum corresponding to some extra-territorial scenario.

In this respect, we need to pose two questions: first, where can we locate moral authority?; and second, from whom and where will feasible alternatives for changing the current state of affairs come? These questions are more demanding when the possibilities of change are apparently less conceivable due to structural differences that reveal contradictory interests. Eventually, one concludes that moral authority does not follow a centralized pattern of duties but

results from manifest abilities to solve acute contemporary problems and design alternatives. And this is to acknowledge that various actors, whether related or not to the institutional apparatus, can exert in different ways the function of moral authority. This also implies that moral authority does not reside forcefully within a specialized social body. In principle, these possibilities are open and take a variety of forms which does not exclude the confluence of intervening social forces and institutions in alliance with other actors promoting better living conditions (regulated and deregulated) in favour of workers. In this confluence the self-liberating efforts of workers acting through their own means (whether institutional, such as their unions or spontaneous organizing processes) can play an important role. In any case, maybe a resilient question concerns the condition of a persistent disadvantage of highly differentiated tomato workers with regard to the company and its points advanced over the negotiation table.⁹ This leads one to ask whether one has to attribute moral authority to some institutional body or agent who can intervene and force the amelioration of workers' life conditions.

Nozick (1974) confronts a similar analytical problem, presented in more abstract terms. He tries to identify certain 'minimal practices of the state' developed by specific agencies and agents capable of guaranteeing basic individual human rights. For this purpose he distinguishes between 'minimal' and 'extensive' forms of state, to project as 'legitimate' some basic functions which are beyond the condition of self-defense, such as protection against violence, theft and fraud and the enforcement of social agreements or contracts. The 'minimal state' imagined by Nozick has also to be able to exert sanctions to protect these basic individual social rights.

The dual conception of state by Nozick has some implicit and explicit analytical difficulties as to how, in concrete situations, we can establish precise boundaries between these basic functions and for whom. Another point concerns the limits and the definition of conditions beyond the level of self-defense which justify the practices of intervention to preserve basic human rights. A further point concerns the means or conditions for using social force to guarantee the rights of social actors, and who will use these means. Nozick's idea of concrete 'minimal' practices of state intervention can be helpful, however, for unveiling a neutral image of the extended state and to analyze how concrete agencies and agents acquire different meanings according to the circumstances.

Chapter IV showed how particular practices of state agency can make a momentous difference in reinforcing company actions in the face of workers' rebellions and repeated claims, such as those for indemnity. Workers acknowledge that the constant surveillance by companies (with their alliances and ability to afford the use of violence if necessary) is still more effective than

workers' resistance. However, various forms of worker resistance, combined with forms of collaboration and negotiation, can make this surveillance totally ineffective. Sometimes the occasional support of a progressive government agent can be important for gaining minimal concessions. Working patterns and life conditions referred to specific boundaries or margins relating to what were considered basic human rights. These were, to some extent, influenced by past experience, but there were occasions where dangerous terrain was entered where past experience was of no help. This was sometimes the case when workers started negotiations with complaints about specific maltreatment and actions against worsening economic or material conditions, but frequently did not get what they wanted. Companies also always lose something in specific conflicts, though the consequences apparently affect the workers more, since the company will balance worker reactions against company initiatives developed for particular purposes i.e. companies can coopt leaders and skilled workers or catch the interests of the mass of workers when a critical situation is approaching. These initiatives can be more effective in dealing with violent reactions than coercive methods.

However, the question of who calculates minimum rights, of what these consist, and who benefits most from the minimal practices put forward by state agents is always a complex matter which is transformed at the negotiating table.

Bringing absent characters back into 'history'

A final comment on the 'political relevance' of tomato workers reveals another strength of micro-sociological experience following an actor-oriented analysis. Especially when reading and rereading literature on workers, I came to realize the pertinence of the phrase of Kundera at the beginning of this thesis that 'things are looser than they seem' though I did not find it so easy to detach myself from 'their gravity that oppress[es] us' when involved in these arguments. What convinced me that looking beyond conventional approaches was of use, were two moments in the research process that I afterwards considered as satisfactory achievements.

The first was the case of Chimino (the worker absent or out of logic), narrated in Chapter V. After the altercation with the Israeli Professor, Chimino came out with strong criticisms of the official version of the truth which at the same time showed me the mechanics of how an official truth operates and the effects derived in terms of reinforcing privileges and commercial interests. The other case, described in Chapter VI as the most ironic moment in fieldwork, was the stoppage of the Aticama group, where I lost and recovered the

possibility to analyze a situation of class behaviour. I reflected on how the meanings involved in these circumstances, which I was expecting to interpret with a fixed model of class, using it as a box to locate workers following a common strategy against the company, were transformed. At this point I realised the complicated ways in which the personal and shared lifeworlds of the group interlocked and how strategies which included different interpretations of class (expressed not only in economic but in cultural terms) presented more flexible alternatives for changing their actual conditions of work. The way these workers decoded their experiences, and the way they internalized values, knowledge and information originating from their households and small town, in combination with the experiences of the tomato fields in a spontaneous process, made me question the idea that social change is better understood following institutional patterns and planned strategies.

Final remarks

Let me close this chapter with a few remarks on the paradoxes and remaining tensions within the analysis of social change. The first issue concerns the diverse interpretations of social change. Another arises from the possibility to chose from diverse approaches, i.e. whether we analyze social change as composed of a series of concrete and fleeting situations or look to the general and supposedly more permanent processes of change. I think that there is no problem in acknowledging that changes can at one and the same time express permanence and multiple realities. However, the configuration of characteristics associated with specific events that produce widespread effects and influence ongoing changes can be a puzzle. It is in these terms that we can place the advent of the tomato industry in the region. The arrival of the tomato companies did not constitute the cause of social change, but we can talk about the social changes unfolding through the operation of the tomato companies within the region. The situations that evolved overlapped and intersected with current and past experiences of the different actors and the networks involved.

This brings me to emphasize a point that is increasingly accepted as fundamental for overcoming the gap between theoretical and empirical conceptualizations, namely, that the study of the changes occurring in working circumstances cannot be isolated from what is happening in other domains since changes cannot be read off from a categorization of domains of social life but must be established empirically within the interconnected situations of everyday life. This view is consistent with a focus upon the ways in which human agents intervene in situations of social change. The point of concern is not a general

one which affirms that human agents can change the state of affairs but explores the concrete possibilities for doing so.

A further related point is that of the relevance of the so-called 'subjects' of social change. This issue is a recurrent topic for sociological debate, whether discussed in terms of the advantages or shortcomings of methodological individualism, the meaning attributed to the 'trivia' of everyday life, or whether associated with ideological extremes such as conservatism, liberalism or anarchism. An extreme interpretation identifies the subjects of change as individual agents who pursue their own interests over and against the interests of the wider community, thus settling for individual gains within the status quo rather than promoting broader structural change. As I stressed in the last section of this chapter, the meanings attributed to these forms of change have nothing to do with the ideologies of conservatism or liberalism, and, if the meaning attributed to anarchism is the submission or justification of exploitative practices, then this too does not tally with my micro-sociological experience. On the contrary, I translate the label 'anarchist' micro-sociology as entailing the need to look beyond conventional models of domination and work, using the notion of 'contingent images' that exposed the instabilities of the status quo and the fluid character of power networks. Following agricultural workers into differing social contexts, as this study has attempted, makes it abundantly clear how individuals never remain isolated, and how they become relevant to understanding mechanisms of power that give meaning to intricate political issues and to the development of particular organizing strategies.

Finally, let me mention another problem which arises from the way we assess social change or conceptualize how change is generated. Focussing on the analysis of change as it actually occurs and not on some 'ideal conditions' or 'models' of change, opens up the possibility of tracing social processes that promote change but which are simultaneously transformed by effective countervailing actions and powers, without assuming that the individuals and groups involved are tied to fixed loyalties or institutional commitments. Through the exploration of everyday struggles aimed at solving problematic situations or needs, we can begin to conceptualize alternative views of complex social processes and situations, which remain far removed from the designs and legal frameworks generated and maintained by 'intelligent parties' and leaders operating within institutional scenarios who may define themselves as committed to the fight for justice.

Notes

1. Scott uses 'infrapolitics' to characterise the situation and resistance of subordinated groups (see Scott 1990, 19: 183-201). Hence, here I characterise his theory as 'infratheoretical'.
2. Eagleton (1991: 45-6) argues that ideologies are usually internally complex, differentiated formations, with conflicts between their various elements which need to be continually renegotiated and resolved. However, he avoids the metaphysical discussion of the 'end of the ideologies' assuming ideology as action oriented or a practical operation. He subscribes himself, in this sense, to Macherey's conception, who sees ideology "as the invisible colour of daily life ... in which we move like a fish in water with no more ability than a fish to grasp this elusive environment as a whole."
3. Remember here the case of Rogelio and the group from Aticama of Chapters II and VI.
4. Giddens (1984) understands that structural constraints at the same time enable and constrain social action.
5. It is difficult to define exactly what unintended consequences means, but there is some ironic circumstance underlying the use of the concept because it is invoked as a sort of general law to explain specific circumstances which are paradoxical such as accumulated social disadvantages. In the Marxist and Weberian nomenclature 'unanticipated' (Ritzer 1983: 75) is used to indicate the propensity of people to undermine capitalist spirit. Boudon (1990) refers to this idea as a paradigm according to which social phenomena should be considered as unintended consequences of individual actions. Boudon gives also an account of the economists, philosophers, and sociologists who used the paradigm, such as Mandeville, Adam Smith, Hayek, Popper. Above all he quotes the work of Merton as the more remarkable. Merton addressed specific questions such as the racism against black workers and the developments of science as the targeted effects to explain through his reformulated theory of unintended consequences of individual actions. Giddens (1984: 14) reshapes the argument with a more sociological emphasis when he talks about 'a social life full of different kinds of unintended consequences with varying ramifications' (quoted in Long and van der Ploeg 1992: 6).
6. For Lacroix (1981: 15) agricultural labour process is the appropriation of nature by humans in order to produce goods (value uses) that satisfy their needs. In addition, she conceives the labour process as articulated and in this sense she includes different elements in the labour process (the means, the objects and the labour itself). As an abstract tool she believes that this theory allows her to analyze articulations present in the processes of relationships where human beings interact with nature and the social environment in which they are embedded.

7. This is a reformulation of his idea of a systematic programme of 'micro-translation' (1981). For a detailed account about the shortcomings of Collins programme see Long, 1989: 227-230.

8. Newby (1977: 78) explains how the so called 'revolt in the field' that happened in England in 1870's despite the national attention which the movement received, and in spite of its undoubted symbolic importance, was still a minor one. There were over 980,000 agricultural workers in England and Wales at that time, and at no stage did the unions of agricultural workers attract much more than a 12% membership. The Mexican revolution is no exception (Knight 1990: 169). It was interpreted as an amalgam of numerous revolutionary experiences. Many Mexicos bred many revolutions. Masses of people were involved, but intermittently, differently from region to region, and mostly under middle class direction. The 'so called' revolutionary activists were always a minority. The involvement of peasants and farm workers varied enormously, ranging from indifference and maybe hostility, to heroic sacrifice. However, for Knight this fact does not invalidate the importance of radicalism and the transforming effect that these processes may have. In the Mexican case it is acknowledged that one of the effects of the revolution was the redistribution of land for cultivation, a change in working conditions and the broad expansion of education facilities and social security.

9. Friedland and Barton (1976: 40) rephrase this question in their description of the modern and flexible factory in the field, that reproduces relationships between employee and employer that are feudal in character.

CHAPTER VIII

AN EPILOGUE: WHO ARE THEY ?

It is at the end of an analytical journey that the researcher encounters a risky terrain where she/he is compelled to produce reformulated categorizations and concluding statements under the pressure of having to make a summary. This is particularly true when I am forced by my own deflated ego to offer enlightenment on the human agency of tomato workers. In taking up this risky challenge, let me start by paraphrasing E.P.Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* where he asks: 'How do I know that you exist, and if, you do, how do I know that my concept [in this case tomato workers] represents your real existence? (Thompson 1979: 198).

The centrality of the notion of human agency

This question leads me to address the issue of human agency for analysing the social circumstances of tomato workers and to assess this by considering the interplay between their ongoing social experiences and their social consciousness. As Thompson emphasizes, the understanding of this interplay is by nature a manifold task because 'if a social being is not an inert table which cannot refute a philosopher with its legs, then neither is social consciousness a passive recipient of "reflections" of that table' (1979: 201). We can summarise the argument by saying that, although human agency is an ongoing social construction effected within and by different dialogical circumstances and the mutual influencing of researcher and researched, focusing on the analytical effects of this interaction makes a difference to one's critical review of the literature on industrial and agricultural workers.

One of the weakest points in the studies of agricultural workers is the way authors deal with human agency. Further, it is not an exaggeration to say that the preoccupation for denouncing exploitative practices, which supposedly has the intention of defending workers, has in fact the opposite effect since from this perspective they are portrayed as powerless and defenseless and almost

imprisoned within certain 'structural conditions' and boundaries. My research on the contrary, verifies what Rosaldo (1990: 114) suggests when analyzing E.P. Thompson's concept of class, namely, that 'human agency always transcends conditioning'. However, I conclude that this is the ironic outcome of my empirical material, which does not readily fit into the framework of a structuralist mode of reasoning and researching, neither does it pretend to offer a model of workers' everyday life that can be interpreted as 'objective truth'. Even if this were theoretically possible, the major constraint of the research timetable precludes following workers into all the circumstances of their work and domestic lives.

However, constraints are not only obstacles. They can also be challenges to seeking new ways of understanding. Hence, getting access to different situational contexts where practices of domination can be examined, makes a difference to the analysis of tomato workers' everyday lives. By locating myself beyond the stereotypical positions and images of power and authority, tomato workers expressed a mixed repertoire of behaviour that embodied consent, rebellion and avoidance. Thus, I was able to make relative what is conceived of as 'superior' and 'inferior'. This is not to say, of course, that such categories are not recognised by the people involved in the tomato industry of Autlán, where inferiority or superiority is still used to characterize current situations and social processes, but to say that the 'state of affairs' can be looked at differently when the conceptual basis for such positions within working and domestic situations weakens. What I can offer as a corollary in this thesis is an analytical outcome which presents social actors involved in contingent and changing circumstances as free from reasons and feelings of inferiority and not afraid of a presumed superiority.

The distinctiveness of human agency

What characterizes human agency, for Giddens (1979), is the transformative capacities expressed by individuals and social groups to have acted otherwise at any point in time. Turner (1992) emphasizes that these transformative capacities are not mere discursive strategies involving knowledgeability, intentionality and consciousness, but are embodiments of social actions.¹⁾

Furthermore, Turner observes (1992: 87) that for Giddens 'the actor is essentially a thinking and choosing agent, not a feeling and being agent'. He also criticises in some detail the neglect of sociology in overlooking a theory of the 'human body', despite the fact that many social actions are grounded in such obvious events - marriage, legitimated copulation, socialization, burial and

rituals of grief - that are mainly expressed through different bodily mechanisms of suffering, pain, joy and death (op. cit.: 92).

Definitions about what constitutes transformative capacities and what these represent in terms of real changes are problematic. Indeed transformative capacities cannot be reflected without developing at the same time concrete analyses of the social embodiments and interrelated contexts. De Vries (1992: 233-4), at the end of his enquiry into state-peasant relations in Costa Rica, shows how different forms of agency are constructed within different relationships between 'authority holders' and farmers. He points to the ways that experts, frontline workers and peasants reshape their notions of agency in relation to issues of representation and flexibility in fixing the boundaries developed in their everyday interactions.

Long (1992b) goes further by distinguishing the interweaving in interactions of at least two different kinds of social constructions associated with ongoing conceptualizations of social actors. He refers specifically to:

'First, [those] which [are] culturally endogenous in that [these are] based upon the kinds of representations characteristics of the culture in which the particular actor is embedded; and second, [those] which arise[s] from the researchers' or analysts' own categories and theoretical orientation' (op. cit.: 25).

He makes a plea for translating culturally these conceptualizations and avoiding a constant 'universal' interpretation of agency across all cultures. Although the perspective suggested by Long is clear, this does not mean that our analysis can straight forwardly proceed without avoiding ambiguous and contradictory circumstances, but that in such circumstances the emergent nature of transformative capacities may arise, that they are shaped and transformed according to the current possibilities and circumstances.

Ambiguities with the notion of passive agents

The situation presented in Chapter VI of the women workers shamed by the cutting of their fingernails, confronts us with the complexities of understanding how transformative capacities overlap with circumstantial or repetitive humiliating practices. This leads me to discuss the problem of the instrumentalization of workers by managers and to reflect on whether the effects of those exerting authority is to create networks of passive and docile agents who obey them (see Law 1986). This is a two-fold problem, since at the same time, people resist and transform conditions of humiliation as we observed in

the case of the women working in the greenhouse. But maybe we can advance a step forward in making more explicit elements in this notion of passive agents by drawing upon the work of Inden (1991: 217), who suggests, in the light of the philosophy and specific historical circumstances of India, that we might possibly come to a less westernized interpretation of being a 'patient'. His suggestion at least allows us to consider that passivity and humiliation are neither the definitive nor the extreme conditions that theories of repression and domination have assumed. Hence it is clear that people suffering humiliation are not only instruments.

Returning to my ethnographic reflections, in the light of cases such as Maria in Chapter II, the examples of avoidance behaviour in Chapter III and the jokers of Chapter VI, who were all apparently acting as subordinated, let me reconsider what this apparent 'passivity', this view of docile and obedient workers at the service of the managers and company planners, in fact implies. Certainly workers reserve the capacity to act otherwise, which in individual circumstances becomes more noticeable. Maria, for example, worked fast only until she got close to finishing the block task, but then chose to rest and take time for herself. The jokers, although requested to work on the Saturday, chose not to come in but to work on their own activities. It was also the case of workers who escaped from the more difficult working conditions and other hindrances to work. If by passivity we imply that they finally complied with company instructions, this does not also entail that it is exactly what managers wanted. Hence so-called passive agents are more active than they at first sight appear to be, although packed under the label of subordinated in different working situations.

The emergent nature of the transformative capacities of social actors

There is no shame in believing that a focus on human agency may convey a paradigmatic stance (see Long 1992) embracing some ideological flavour, but of course this is different from arguing that by using actor-oriented analysis as a paradigm we are approaching realities from a closed ideological position, as Collins supposes. Taking human agency seriously as a paradigmatic approach led me to interpret the situations during the party after the fingernail incident as a concrete way to analyze the embodiments of social actions and to look upon such events as concrete examples of how the transformative capacities of tomato workers emerge and operate. Their reconquest of the work scenario, where their humiliation had taken place, reveals the occurrence of several transformations at the same time - no matter their contingent nature - which are

not mere symbols, since these transformations impinged upon aspects considered by the company to be 'structural components' of their operations. The changes relating to the party affected the timing and disciplining of work and the roles of people interacting in that place. The women transformed themselves (noticeably through ways of speaking and dressing) into capable organizers who were able to convince and enrol other workers in extra work, collect money for specific purposes and to perform a sketch for the celebration which allowed them to recover face.

The meaning that I assign to these ways of expressing transformative capacities may be questionable. It could be said that they are not real transformations since nothing has really changed and after the party further collective humiliations may still take place. But what I would argue is that a thorough follow up of the actors leads to grasping the embodiments of social actions and to seeing and interconnecting their humiliation and transformation at the party, as part of the ongoing and unfolding processes of the everyday life of these tomato workers. This allows one to transcend an interpretation of an event such as the transformation at the party as separate from the other processes which underpin or lie behind such transformations.

In construing the agent and her/his transformative capacities, the images produced by others are very important. Strathern (1988: 272) goes further, arguing that 'an agent is one who acts with another in mind, and that other may in fact coerce the agent into so acting'. This is why individuals cannot be seen as agents taken alone. Agency is socially constructed. Hence agency is identified with organizing practices that relate to persuasive power and charisma, i.e. to effective ways of exerting power, of translating interests or enrolling others in specific projects (Long 1992: 23).

As we observed in Chapter V, power and skills became understandable by the actions of the others. Chapter V, in particular, showed how the exercise of power and skillful practice are effected by the acknowledgement of a specific network of fellow workers (who created a champion out of Ricardo for defeating the boss), though sometimes expressed in the name of the company. In this way, one can see that it is a physical sequence of actions more than words and symbols which carry important consequences for the actual organizing situation of companies. Hence, the attribution of agency or lack of agency is extended also to the workers, as was the case with the Aticama group, who according to Chimino were '*unos chingones* who got what they wanted from the company'.

The analysis of the images of agency created by others (observers and fellows) can be complicated by the possible overlapping of different interpretations. Perhaps inevitably one has to wait and see whether the image

corresponds with real capabilities, actions and events. This picture is even more complex if one also takes into account the effects of propaganda, 'official truths', denigrating stereotypes and fictions carried by the electronic media and people's own 'contingent utopias'. To some extent, the caricatures, described in Chapter I, depict something of what can be considered 'real' behaviour. Slater (1991: 29) suggests that Long's idea of 'culturally endogenous' notions of agency should include the penetration of externally-produced culture carried through the electronic media. In the situations presented in Chapter VI the women and the group of Aticama used media images to promote self-reliance. Of course, mentioning their use does not exhaust the issue of externally penetrating influences which need special attention in empirical research. A focus on these influences might avoid the pre-given positions such as that which attributes a great deal of power to managers and the manipulators of the media and that which assigns a weak and passive stance to the audience. This aspect of the interconnection of external and internal images, representing a multiplicity of influences, could be researched in relation to images of agency other than those carried in the external media, for example, those locally grounded in rumour, bias, gossip etc.

This brings us back to the issue of passivity, and to absent characters and to the dissolution of the agency which is attributed to groups or which relies on underlying events. When people are enrolled in a network, she/he who is in command becomes the agent and the others are regarded as passive, less important etc. I have mentioned several times how 'invisibility' and derogatory labels can influence the description and changes in the living and working conditions of workers, and I described how some stereotypes about workers are disseminated which reinforce a tendency to neglect the possibilities of acknowledging workers' capabilities. But this cannot be taken as definitive. Another angle worth analyzing is that of assigning a preconceived image of passivity to those enrolled in specific networks. This neglects the fact that those enrolled may do so to use the power of the actor who enrolls them for their own purposes, or that often it is the case that the command is always rotated and passes between different hands.

Looking for a future research agenda

In thinking of a way to conclude this thesis, perhaps, a normal course would be to exhaust all the features and implications of human agency presented in previous chapters. But in the last paragraph I started to suffer anxieties by thinking of the perspectives beyond this academic journey, and so I propose to

make this the cut-off point for the thesis. This is not because future questions represent a literary alternative to final summary statements. For me as a researcher it also conveys a conviction that what we know about the social actors with whom we have interacted is always limited. It is monstrous to believe that a researcher can sort out all the research problems he aims to deal with.

It is my belief that researchers sooner or later and in different ways have to come to terms with the ironic outcomes of their work, and for this, contact with a wider audience is always challenging. How then do I answer the question posed in the hectic situation of an everyday life, such as 'summarize in two phrases the findings of your thesis?' This can jeopardize the difference between the essence and the data presented in the analytical results of any social scientist. An ironic outcome of my research journey is that in trying to answer the questions with which I began, I end up with more questions than I began with. And since in my questioning issues of human agency has consistently intrigued me and re-emerged, I will end by underlining several angles for future research.

I start by presenting questions concerning the definitions of agents and subjects. This implies thinking through the contingency of the position of the tomato workers, and the implications of this for the notions of overlapping lifeworlds (personal and shared) and the interconnections of different domains of action (house and work).

There is a general contention that people are defined by what they do. I defined tomato workers by their involvement in tomato work but there are some problematic angles which demand a more detailed examination. Many tomato workers (and this is the case with many of the women) do several jobs at the same time, which interconnect the events and practices of different domains. These people define themselves and are defined by different images and notions which, if pursued, bring us to an intriguing point of enquiry. We are led to ask in what way workers who are exceptional agents - in expressing their transformative capacities through their level of skills and power in working conditions, do so at home? Does their behaviour at work contrast greatly with their behaviour at home, or vice-versa, where they may be transformed into the absent or invisible?

Another set of questions can be grouped around what I call the 'colours' of agency, i.e. gender, class, age and ethnic characteristics which, although frequently mentioned, I have not systematically tackled. This requires looking at these aspects also in the various domains where people act with different ideas and manifest specific individual and collective identities. The point is to focus on how agency bears upon such aspects, which of course change

according to circumstances and are frequently intertwined, being less or more relevant in different situations for the same worker, family, squad or company. In fact, power/knowledge differentials are intricately related to the locally-grounded cultural expressions of such aspects. I touched upon these when I compared fieldwork contexts where worker and manager imagery which contrasted with the portrayal of them in the existing literature, such as the case of the apparent disadvantaged condition of indigenous migrant workers, who live in isolated encampments in a sort of apartheid situation but who, in some respects, extract more economic benefits and have a greater propensity to rebel than local workers. Another situation was that of understanding the specific links of gender to positions of authority in the companies, which confirm or contrast with patterns operating in the household domain.

A final set of questions involves notions of what one might conceptualize as 'effective agency', in other words concerning the quality of agency. For whom and under which circumstances is it effective? If we consider that it is mostly others (observers, fellow workers and counterparts) who define what is effective, we are led to question what precisely is the essence of the qualities of social agency.

Although individual expressions of agency are more noticeable, this is eventually tied to the agency of those occupying positions of relevance within institutional frameworks who can in principle promote 'effective agency' and transformation. In other words, we must ask ourselves where we can locate the effectivity of agency, and if this can be measured in the long and short term in some way or other. The problem is that dealing with contingent expressions that are not generalizable requires a detailed examination of other interrelated issues that cross this analytical perspective. In this way, we can extend the question of effective agency to cover institutional initiatives (endogenous and exogenous) to see if these can represent, promote or generate the agency of the workers (we may include here workers' unions and other local organizing expressions). In other words, to explore whether effective agency relies mostly on self-organizing efforts and processes or whether institutional initiatives offer as little hope as they appear to do.

Notes

1. This may coincide with the idea of interlocking projects by Long and van der Ploeg (1992)

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Annex 1. Newspaper clipping



Weekly bulletin
for international
students in
The Netherlands

NUFFIC



NL 6/92 - 13 February 1992

JOBS FOR IMMIGRANTS

Unemployment among minority groups is 31%, compared to 7% among the ethnic Dutch. A report by *Stichting van de Arbeid* has concluded that voluntary agreement between labour and management that employers would hire more members of the minorities has had little effect. Three companies out of four have never even heard of the agreement, and only 3% have made any effort.

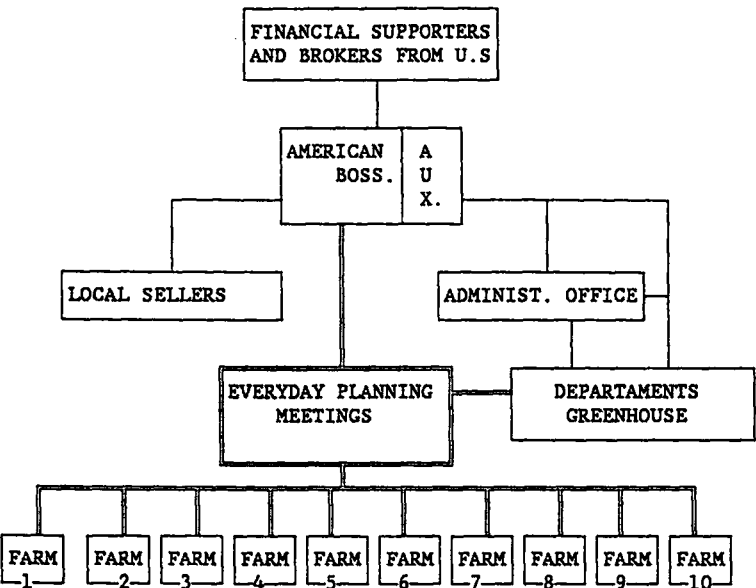
According to *NRC Handelsblad*, it will probably become mandatory for employers to keep a register of their employees' ethnic backgrounds as a way of pressuring them into hiring more members of minority groups. A majority in parliament favours this, although the Christian Democrats and the management organisations continue to oppose any such legislation of employment policy.

Meanwhile, reports about employment

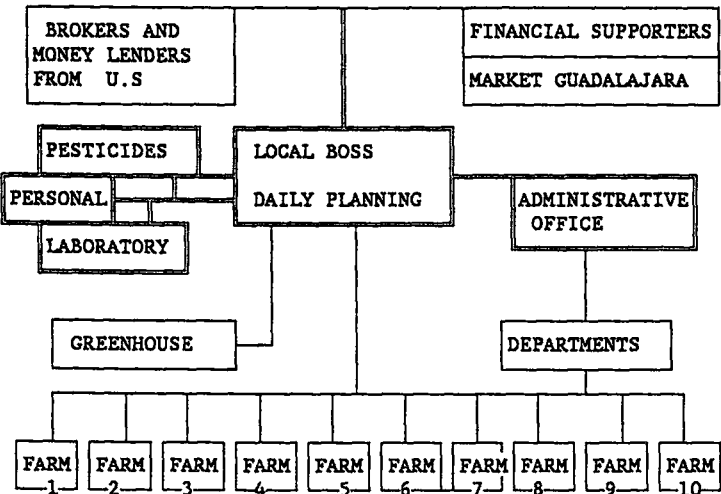
in the horticulture industry reveal that illegal immigration puts many legal immigrants out of work. Police in The Hague estimate that between 15,000 and 30,000 illegal immigrants work in the nearby glasshouses. Many growers would rather pay f 5 to f 10 an hour to workers who have no rights than pay f 35 an hour to legal workers. A social affairs ministry official told *NCR*, "If we do nothing to stop this, we are legalising social exploitation." Police and labour inspectors have promised to intensify their investigations in 1992. This caused a brief scare in the glasshouses; within two weeks in January the number of registered job vacancies jumped from 40 to 476.

There is demand for illegal immigrants mainly for irregular, heavy and/or dangerous work: in agriculture, the garment industry, hotel and restaurants, and cleaning.

Annex 2. Organizational chart of the Rose company




First period: under the administration of the American entrepreneur 1971 -1985



Second period: under the Mexican ownerships 1985-1988

Annex 3. Newspaper clipping



NOTICIAS

REGIONALES

AGROPACION NACIONAL PERIODISTICA

REG. FED. DE COM. NDLG 260729-100 CUENTA EDO. 3874 Periodista: GUILLERMO ROLDÁN LLAMAS

AÑO XIV
AUTLAN, JAL.,
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AHORA SI SE APLICARA DEBIDAMENTE EL SISTEMA DE RIEGO POR GOTEÓ

La competencia mundial de la comercialización de hortalizas y frutas está muy dura, por lo tanto los agricultores mexicanos requerimos actualizarnos en el renglón tecnológico, señaló lo anterior el Lic. Mario Haroldo Robles Escalante, Gerente General de la Unión Nacional de Organismos de Productores de Hortalizas y Frutas, al terminar el curso de riego por goteo y fertilización que se efectuó en esta ciudad durante cuatro semanas en un programa conjunto entre México-Israel con la participación de productores de varios estados del país.

También dijo que este programa de trabajo es parte de los objetivos que la Unión Nacional está buscando de incorporar las mejores tecnologías para aumentar la producción y la eficiencia de los productores para rescatar la posición en el mercado de Estados Unidos y de otros lugares del mundo a donde llegan productos de América que han desplazado a lo nuestro.

Dijo sentirse satisfecho de que en este lugar se estén haciendo esfuerzos decididos para incorporar nuevas tecnologías como el riego por goteo lo que demuestra que hay una mentalidad progresista de los agricultores de hortalizas y frutas que reutilizan en producción.

Por su parte, el Ingeniero Agrónomo Daniel Michel Padilla, uno de los alumnos que vinieron del Estado de Colima, dijo que el curso le pareció muy provechoso porque permitió diseñar sistemas de riego por goteo para el cultivo de hortalizas y frutas para aumentar la producción por hectárea.



El Ing. Abi Sede, científico israelita que dirigió el curso junto con la ingeniero Mata que también asistió al importante curso.



Los dirigentes locales José Llamas Medina, Francisco Simón Miranda y Gabriel Castro Cervera, junto con el Lic. Mario Haroldo Robles en la clausura del curso de riego.

zas y frutas para aumentar la producción por hectárea.

Asegura que en la actualidad se cosecha unas 25 toneladas de melón por hectárea y con el sistema de riego se producen el doble para exportación aplicando la nueva tecnología.

Aclaró que el sistema de riego por goteo se utiliza desde hace tiempo en el país, pero de acuerdo a los conocimientos obtenidos en el curso, nunca se ha aplicado debidamente la tecnología requerida, culpando por ello a vendedores que solo venden el equipo y ahora los expositores israelitas nos han enseñado la tecnología para aplicarla en el campo mexicano.

El curso de riego por goteo y fertilización fue organizado por la Asociación Agrícola Local de Productores de Hortalizas de Autlán con el apoyo de la U. N. P. H., Unión Nacional de Organismos productores de hortalizas y frutas, como consecuencia de un estudio realizado por estas instituciones que fueron apoyadas por el Ing. Abi Sede, Director del Campo Experimental del Departamento de Genética vegetal del Instituto Científico Neishman de Israel, explicó Gabriel Castro Cervera, Gerente de la Asociación Local.

Los alumnos que asistieron vienen de la zona de Casimiro Castillo, Jalisco; de los Estados de Colima, Baja California, Sinaloa, Michoacán y Guanajuato; fueron 23 Ingenieros Agrónomos y un médico alópata que por circunstancias especiales y personales aprovechó la oportunidad



Los alumnos demuestran teóricamente que entendieron perfectamente el curso de riego explicando a sus compañeros, maestros y dirigentes la utilización debida para aumentar la producción y calidad de hortalizas y frutas.

que era para su hermano que falleció en forma accidental.

Se dieron cuenta de que gran parte de los sistemas de riego existentes no trabajan de acuerdo a su potencial de eficiencia, debido a que algunos de los sistemas antiguos no fueron diseñados, en otros casos no se preparó adecuadamente el personal técnico que lo hace funcionar, en cuanto a funcionamiento en si y al cálculo de gastos intervalos de agua aplicar, como así mismo a los cálculos correctos de fertilizantes.

De acuerdo a la información dada por el científico y profesor Abi Sade, la principal ventaja del riego por goteo consiste en dar a cada planta el gasto de agua y los elementos mayores y menores exactos en el momento preciso, y no el de ahorrar agua como generalmente se cree; debido a que el ahorro del líquido se consigue debido a la alta eficiencia del sistema. Riego dodado pierde de 0.5 litros de agua por litro de agua aplicada. Riego por goteo 0.05 litros de agua por litro de agua aplicada.

Debida a ello, con dicho sistema se logran producciones de 120 toneladas de tomate bola

por hectárea, de 40 a 50 toneladas por hectárea de melón y de 60 a 70 toneladas de cilantro por hectárea, producciones además de ser altas, son de gran calidad.

Los temas fueron dictados por tres expertos israelitas, el Ing. Agrónomo Abi Sade, el Ingeniero Hidráulico Daniel Savaldi y el Ingeniero Agrónomo Amos El Gil; también intervinieron dos expertos mexicanos, el Ingeniero Víctor Quintana de Aullán y el Ingeniero Carlos Chico Hall de Culiacán Sinaloa.

Ellos hablaron sobre la "relación suelo-planta agua, nociones básicas de hidráulica, química

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del suelo, fertilizantes químicos, combinación de estos con riego, Riego por goteo y sus accesorios, cultivo de melón, sandía y tomate bola, así como análisis económico; y comparativo: sistemas de riego, bombeo y molinos, tanques y reservorios, planificación y diseños de equipos de riego por goteo.

En las tres primeras semanas se recibieron conocimientos técnicos y prácticos de los temas señalados, acompañados de giras profesionales a nivel de campo de los participantes en donde se puede apreciar de cerca algunos de los métodos aprendidos en cuanto a cálculos de gastos de agua y el funcionamiento de los equipos de riego existentes en la región.

En la noche de entrega de los certificados de asistencia, los alumnos dieron a conocer que ya cuentan con las herramientas técnicas y necesarias para apreciar diseños, planificar diseños, calcular gastos de agua y fertilizantes y un manejo en forma correcta de los equipos de riego por goteo, de lo anterior fueron testigos los directivos de la Asociación Local de Productores, José Llamas Medina, presidente, Francisco Simón Miranda, Nivaldo Arechiga, el presidente municipal Dr. Faustino Gutiérrez Lugo y otros.

El beneficio del curso de riego por goteo y fertilización podrá ser de inmediato. En los próximos años traerá como consecuencia el aumento de cantidad y calidad de producción de los cultivos que ya se manejan o se manejarán en el futuro, explicó el Prof. Abi Sade, con equipos de riego por goteo.



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EL GRULLO.

SUMMARY

For many years sociological literature on agricultural labourers has largely focused on how surplus value is generated and extracted by both direct and indirect means in the agricultural labour process. However this perspective overlooks the ways in which agricultural workers are important protagonists in the creation and transformation of their own living and working conditions. Labourers appear as subordinate beings, subject to company regimes that operate under formal and informal regulatory forms which are depicted as remaining beyond their control. This point of view inevitably reproduces conceptual images wherein workers are subject to alienating social conditions which determine a constant deterioration in their standards of living and those of their families.

This thesis explores a different path. Taking as a specific reference point the tomato industry of the Autlán-El Grullo valley in western Mexico, my aim is to analyze the heterogeneous social behaviour of workers who live under extremely complex everyday circumstances. The study's perspective unfolds from the close-up study of the workday. The main challenge is to gain access to the multiple meanings which underlie the trivialities or petty events of daily life which have been systematically written off as less interesting for sociological study. Hence I question the premise - advocated in many sociological studies on labourers - that bosses' and labourers' relations or games of power and knowledge are always and simply victimizing workers.

In order for this predominant hypothesis of bosses' hegemony to yield us some explanatory value, we insist that it should account for the multiple variations and conditions under which asymmetrical relations of power and knowledge reproduce themselves. As a result this book takes as its point of departure a critical perspective whereby bosses' hegemony or domination is seen to be problematic. This implies conceiving of the process of domination and subordination as the inconclusive result of life circumstances. These circumstances can be analyzed as processes constructed by the actors, where workers themselves are able to develop non-subordinate behaviours, although they can also consent to their own subordination.

Throughout the book the reader will see how the theoretical focus takes shape, highlighting various practices or expressions of "the force of irony". This focus is the result of an intermittent reflective struggle which the

researcher develops in his zeal to understand the implications of the crucial problem of workers' human agency. This consists in defining workers' transformative capacities, how they function in practice and how workers manage to change aspects of the social conditions in which they live.

The book was written for academics interested in the social sciences and for scholars or practitioners dedicated to the problems of development who work for government institutions or non-governmental organizations. It formed part of a multidisciplinary research project of Wageningen Agricultural University and the Colegio de Jalisco called "Contrasting Patterns of Irrigation Organization, Peasant Strategies and Planned Intervention: Comparative Studies in Western Mexico".

The empirical foundations of the thesis are the ethnographic situations described in Chapters II, III, IV, V and VI. In these I challenge the frequently held assumption that ethnography is theoretically weak, and show how ethnographic situations orient theoretical efforts and help us reach an understanding of workers' everyday lives. The thesis is structured around two thematics: 1) theoretical and methodological reflections (Chapters I, II, VII and VIII) and 2) the analysis of the politics of everyday tomato work (Chapters III, IV, V and VI).

Chapter I takes account of: a) The transformation of the subject and object of study, making reference to the successive reframing of the researcher's questions and how an actor-oriented perspective can help construct a theoretically informed ethnography; b) the recent change in orientation of studies of workers, with the central challenge being to understand the complexity of workers' daily lives; c) the ethnocentric nature of sociological intervention; d) the book's specific objective in offering a local theory based on concrete social practices which avoids the pretentious construction of a universal model of workers' behaviour; e) the analytical perspective based on the concept of irony and its basis in the differentiated practices of labourers who work under diverse circumstances; and f) the interactive scenarios studied and thematic content of the thesis.

In Chapter II the methodological discussion is deepened by clarifying the political character of research, which cannot simply be reduced to neutral contemplation. Using the Mexican metaphor "Plunging into the garlic", the first section presents an original characterization of what it means to intervene sociologically. The second section deals specifically with the political character of fieldwork. This refers to the different forms of conflict in which researchers and their interlocutors (who have different interests and ideological prejudices) finally negotiate a sociological text that reflects the development of various interactive processes. The third section discusses the problem of the researcher's

"methodological access". This cannot be reduced to the possibilities of being close to or distant from the centres of power or decision making. Instead, the crucial point is to gain access to a greater comprehension of the multiple meanings implicit in complex everyday situations. The final section establishes the analytical consequences which a given methodology can have. Here central questions are posed which are relevant for the theoretical focus of the ensuing chapters.

Chapter III analyzes how tomato production is directly carried out in the tomato fields. It defines the specific concept of tomato work and highlights the heterogeneity of tomato workers' behaviour and its significance. Tomato work is understood as a series of specific tasks and subtasks which can vary infinitely. These are seen in the specific contexts of daily chores programmed for the tomato season, shaped through the company's history. As such, they are conceived of as particular modalities of labour processes which result from the interplay of global and local influences. We are dealing, then, with a notion which includes the productive and reproductive relations of social life. Its objective is to approximate the points of interconnection and the forms of consensus underlying the organizing principles or work rhythms followed in everyday life and commonly expressed in the idea of "catching up with the harvest" (*alcanzar el corte*). The workers' heterogeneity in terms of gender, age, status and commitment to the job emerges from an analysis of the workday. In this sense, tomato work is not an essentialist category which simply stems from face-to-face exchanges; instead it is a very mixed, dynamic process which reveals itself through the constant adaptive mechanisms which workers put into practice in their different established work routines.

Chapter IV studies the political content of tomato work but stresses my objections to abstract conceptions of politics. From this perspective, and with the aim of identifying the features of a local political profile, the first section states the problems and specific conflicts that emerge from the tomato industry's operation in the region. The second section reconstructs the history of the Autlán valley and describes how various cultural repertoires in the region are interwoven. It also examines the variegated combinations of political values and practices among the different social groups living in the Autlán-El Grullo valley. The third section emphasizes how groups of local producers and workers internalize transnational companies' ways of doing things, which are characterized by the introduction of technological packages and procedures. However, it bears repeating that this is not a unilateral process. Rather, there is a dialogical process, since "external" ways of doing things are transformed and finally fused with local traditions and styles. The last section explores the interconnections between company disciplinary methods and workers' self-

regulation.

Chapter V examines the forms of worker power and the ways in which worker abilities are forged. The focus highlights the dynamic character of power relations. Power is conceptualized as a phenomenon which is constructed and negotiated and which can only be analyzed through its operation. That is, it appears on the scene when actions that confer power to an individual, social group or company within a social network or during the development of a conflict, are identified. Moreover, this implies considering the many variations and the constant possibility of ruptures in the established order. The chapter is divided in two ethnographic sections. The first describes the case of a worker who is reinstated in his former position as company greenhouse foreman, replacing an agricultural technician. This runs counter to the prevailing tendency of replacing manual workers with professional personnel. The second presents the case of a very able worker who makes a fool of an international irrigation expert just when he tries to demonstrate the advantages of cutting edge technology and how to operate new irrigation equipment to a group of technicians and businessmen who are taking a course from him. This situation invites a critical review of the local effects deriving from technological change.

Chapter VI discusses "the force of irony" in greater detail and examines three situations developed during work routines and characterized by different meanings of irony. I explain how work in the Autlán tomato industry can be depicted as a doubly ironic social condition: on one hand, we are mostly speaking of part-time labourers and of workers who are constantly migrating. Their legal and human rights are not insured. On the other hand, the transnational and local companies characterize themselves as "companies on wheels" but are incapable of guaranteeing good short-term profits.

Examining the practices of irony also includes specific attempts to describe workers' conceptual articulations and ways of speaking when they intervene in the work process. Here we are not dealing only with individual expressions but with collective profiles. In some ways, workers share power and in others they challenge it, but in the final analysis one can see the ways in which they transform the alienation of their work routines. The irony they display is not a power with identical modalities or even uniform intensity. It is more like a drop of water which slowly but surely wears away the stone.

Chapter VII revises the conceptualizations of change in workers' life worlds. In a way, it makes the dialogue between ethnographic reflections and sociological literature - which was begun in earlier chapters - more explicit. The first section very specifically questions the meanings of both ordinary and extraordinary change in workers' living conditions. It also questions the contributions of theories which attempt to make change more comprehensible.

In the framework of ethnographic situations, the specific possibilities of adopting different macro- or micro- theoretical models for understanding structural change are discussed. The second section reviews the contributions made by the theory of the work process. It asserts that it is necessary to rework the conceptual focus to include a great variety of company disciplinary forms and worker forms of self-regulation and resistance. It also explores differences in gender, class and age in formal and informal work contexts. The final section reconstructs an ethical-political micro-order in the specific circumstances of tomato work.

Chapter VIII is a distillation of the thesis which summarizes various explicit or implicit attempts to describe workers' human agency in the other chapters. The notion of human agency asserted in this final chapter goes beyond the sociological literature's conceptions of agricultural workers, which have proven to be among that literature's weakest points. Here I assert that exploitation, social marginalization and subordination must not only be seen as obstacles to human agency; instead, on occasions, these must also be interpreted as challenges which impel people to go beyond social conditioning. In fact, the way in which human agency is conceived tells us that it is socially constructed and that it cannot realize itself as an isolated component of individual choice. On the contrary, human agency always presents itself as an embodiment of organized group practices. In these organizational practices, persuasive and charismatic powers that attract other social actors develop until they crystallize in exercises of power. These exercises are the result of diverse forms of involvement in specific projects and interests. Even when workers' passivity appears to persist because they are enmeshed in a specific power network, one should not ignore the possibility that they are making use of the power of other actors, who in turn are enmeshed in their own projects. At least one must consider that passivity is never total and that the reigns of power can change hands, if only for fleeting moments.

SAMENVATTING

Jarenlang heeft de sociologische literatuur over landarbeiders zich voornamelijk beziggehouden met de vraag hoe meerwaarde wordt voortgebracht en op directe en indirecte wijze wordt afgeroomd in het agrarische arbeidsproces. Dit perspectief ziet evenwel voorbij aan de wijze waarop landarbeiders vechten voor het creëren en transformeren van hun eigen leef- en werkomstandigheden. Arbeiders worden gezien als ondergeschikte mensen, onderworpen aan het regime van het bedrijf met zijn formele en informele regels waarop de arbeiders geen invloed kunnen uitoefenen. Dit gezichtspunt leidt onvermijdelijk tot een beeldvorming waarin arbeiders zijn onderworpen aan vervreemdende sociale omstandigheden, die een voortdurende verslechtering van hun levenspeil en dat van hun gezinnen tot gevolg heeft.

Dit proefschrift bewandelt een andere weg. Mij vooral richtend op de tomatenbedrijven in de Autlán-El Grullo vallei in westenlijk Mexico, heb ik mij tot doel gesteld te komen tot een analyse van de heterogene sociale gedragspatronen van arbeiders die leven onder extreem complexe dagelijkse omstandigheden. Het perspectief van de studie wordt ontwikkeld bij een dieptestudie van de werkdag. De belangrijkste uitdaging is door te dringen tot de veelvoudige zingevingen die ten grondslag liggen aan de triviale gebeurtenissen van alledag, die systematisch zijn verwaarloosd als zijnde van minder belang voor sociologisch onderzoek. Vandaar dat ik de premisse aanvecht, die in veel sociologische studies over arbeiders wordt voorgestaan, dat in de relaties en machtsspelletjes tussen bazen en arbeiders, de arbeiders altijd aan de verliezende kant staan.

Voor zover deze dominante hypothese over de hegemonie van de bazen iets verklaart, moet het rekening houden met de veelheid van variaties en omstandigheden onder welke asymmetrische machtsrelaties en kennis zich reproduceren. Als een gevolg hiervan neemt dit boek als vertrekpunt een kritisch perspectief, waarin de hegemonie of dominantie van de bazen wordt gezien als problematisch. Dit houdt in dat het proces van dominantie en ondergeschiktmaking wordt gezien als het onzekere resultaat van leefomstandigheden. Deze omstandigheden kunnen worden geanalyseerd als processen die door de actoren worden gevormd en waarin arbeiders zelf niet-ondergeschikt gedrag kunnen ontwikkelen, maar ook kunnen toestemmen in hun eigen ondergeschiktheid.

Door het hele boek heen valt te lezen hoe de theoretische focus gestalte krijgt door het belichten van verscheidene praktijken of uitingen van 'de kracht

van de ironie'. Deze focus is het resultaat van een onophoudelijk reflectief gevecht dat de onderzoeker moet leveren bij zijn streven om de implicaties te begrijpen van het cruciale probleem van de 'human agency' van de arbeiders. Dit houdt in dat het vermogen van de arbeiders om veranderingen teweeg te brengen moet worden gedefinieerd, alsook de wijze waarop dat vermogen in de praktijk functioneert en de manier waarop arbeiders erin slagen aspecten van hun sociale omstandigheden te veranderen.

Het boek is geschreven voor academici, geïnteresseerd in de sociale wetenschappen en voor vakgenoten en uitvoerders, die zich bezig houden met ontwikkelingsproblemen en die werken voor overheidsinstellingen of niet-overheidsinstellingen. Het maakt deel uit van een gezamenlijk multi-disciplinair onderzoeksproject van de Landbouwwuniversiteit Wageningen en het Collegio de Jalisco onder de titel 'Contrasting Patterns of Irrigation Organization: Peasant Strategies and Planned Intervention, Comparative Studies in western Mexico'.

De etnografische situaties zoals beschreven in de hoofdstukken II, III, IV, V and VI, vormen de empirische grondslag van deze studie. Ik bestrijd hier de veelvuldig aangehangen veronderstelling dat etnografie theoretisch zwak is en ik laat zien hoe etnografische situaties richting geven aan theorievorming en ons helpen te komen tot begrip van het dagelijks leven van arbeiders. Het proefschrift is opgezet rond twee thema's: 1) theoretische en methodologische reflecties (Hoofdstukken I, II, VII and VIII) en 2) de analyse van de machtsverhoudingen in het dagelijks leven in de tomatenbedrijven (Hoofdstukken III, IV, V and VI).

Hoofdstuk I schenkt aandacht aan: a) de transformatie van het subject en object van studie, waarbij gerefereerd wordt aan het successievelijk aanpassen van de vraagstelling, en aan hoe een actor-georiënteerd perspectief kan helpen bij de constructie van een theoretisch gefundeerde etnografie; b) de recente verschuiving van de oriëntatie in de studies over arbeiders met als centrale uitdaging het krijgen van inzicht in de complexiteit van het dagelijks leven van arbeiders; c) het etnocentrische karakter van sociologische interventie; d) het specifieke doel van dit boek om een theorie te verschaffen, die gebaseerd is op concrete sociale praktijken en die zich niet begeeft in de pretentieuze constructie van een universeel model van het gedrag van arbeiders; e) het analytisch perspectief dat is gebaseerd op het concept van ironie en de basis die ironie heeft in het gedifferentieerde doen en laten van arbeiders, werkend onder verschillende omstandigheden; f) de bestudeerde interactieve scenario's en de thematische inhoud van de dissertatie.

In Hoofdstuk II wordt de methodologische discussie verdiept door het verduidelijken van het politieke karakter van onderzoek; het kan niet simpelweg worden gereduceerd tot een onpartijdige beschouwing. Met gebruikmaking van

de Mexicaanse metafoor 'duiken in de knoflook' geeft het eerste deel een karakterisering van wat het betekent om sociologisch te interveniëren. Het tweede deel gaat specifiek over het politieke karakter van veldwerk. Dit heeft betrekking op de verschillende vormen van conflict waarin onderzoekers en hun gesprekspartners - die verschillende belangen en ideologische vooroordelen hebben - uiteindelijk over een sociologische verwoording onderhandelen die de ontwikkeling van de diverse interactieve processen weergeeft. In het derde deel wordt het probleem besproken van de methodologische benadering van de onderzoeker. Dan gaat het niet om de mogelijkheden om dichtbij of veraf te zijn van de centra van macht en besluitvorming; maar het cruciale punt is om toegang te krijgen tot een breder begrip van de veelheid van betekenissen die aanwezig zijn in complexe alledaagse situaties. In het laatste deel wordt aangegeven wat de analytische consequenties kunnen zijn van een bepaalde methodologie. Hier worden centrale vragen gesteld die relevant zijn voor het theoretische focus van de volgende hoofdstukken.

Hoofdstuk III analyseert de manier waarop de tomatenproductie in de tomatenvelden in zijn werk gaat. Het definieert het specifieke concept van het werk in de tomaten en stelt de heterogeniteit van het gedrag van de arbeiders en de betekenis ervan in het licht. Het werk in de tomaten wordt gezien als een reeks van specifieke taken en subtaken die eindeloos kunnen variëren. Ze worden gezien in de specifieke context van de dagelijkse werkzaamheden zoals die geprogrammeerd zijn voor het tomatenseizoen, volgens de traditie van het bedrijf. Als zodanig worden ze gezien als speciale vormen van werkprocessen, die resulteren uit het samenspel van mondiale en lokale invloeden. We hebben dan te maken met een denkbeeld dat de produktieve en reproductieve relaties van het sociale leven omvat. Het doel ervan is de knooppunten te indiceren en de vormen van consensus die ten grondslag liggen aan de werkdiscipline of het werkritme van alledag en dat algemeen wordt uitgedrukt in het idee van 'zorgen dat de oogst binnengehaald wordt', (*alcanzar el corte*). De heterogeniteit van de arbeiders wat betreft geslacht, leeftijd, status en plichtsbesef, wordt duidelijk door de analyse van een werkdag. Het werk in de tomaten is niet een wezenlijke categorie die eenvoudigweg voortkomt uit persoonlijke contacten; het is daarentegen een zeer gemengd, dynamisch proces dat zichzelf openbaart door de constante aanpassingsmechanismen die de arbeiders hanteren in hun verschillende vaste werkroulines.

Hoofdstuk IV bestudeert de politieke inhoud van het werk en benadrukt de afstand die ik neem van abstracte concepties van politiek. Vanuit dit perspectief en met het oogmerk om een politiek profiel te schetsen van de situatie ter plaatse, benoem ik in het eerste deel de problemen en specifieke conflicten die voortkomen uit de aanwezigheid van de tomatenbedrijven in het gebied. Het

tweede deel verhaalt de geschiedenis van de Autlán-El Grullo vallei en beschrijft hoe diverse culturele patronen in het gebied met elkaar verweven zijn. Ook worden de uiteenlopende combinaties van politieke waarden en praktijken van de verschillende sociale groeperingen in de Autlán-El Grullo vallei onderzocht. Het derde deel benadrukt hoe groepen van lokale producenten en arbeiders de werkwijzen van trans-nationale bedrijven internaliseren, werkwijzen die worden gekenmerkt door nieuwe technologische pakketten en procedures. Het moet evenwel worden herhaald: het is geen unilateraal proces. Er is veeleer sprake van een proces (in een dialoog-vorm), omdat externe werkwijzen worden getransformeerd en uiteindelijk vermengd met lokale tradities en werkstijlen. Het laatste deel onderzoekt de wederzijdse relaties tussen de disciplinaire methoden van het bedrijf en de zelfregulatie van de arbeiders.

Hoofdstuk V onderzoekt de vormen van macht van de arbeiders en de wijzen waarop de bekwaamheden van de arbeiders worden gevormd. De nadruk ligt op het dynamische karakter van machtsverhoudingen. Macht wordt geconceptualiseerd als een fenomeen dat wordt geconstrueerd, waarover onderhandeld wordt en dat alleen geanalyseerd kan worden door de manier waarop het functioneert. Dat wil zeggen, macht verschijnt ten tonele als handelingen die macht verlenen aan een individu, een sociale groepering of een bedrijf binnen een sociaal netwerk of gedurende de ontwikkeling van een conflict, als macht worden geïdentificeerd. Bovendien betekent dit het in aanmerking nemen van de vele variaties en de constante mogelijkheid van breuken in de gevestigde orde. Het hoofdstuk is verdeeld in twee etnografische paragrafen. De eerste beschrijft het geval van een arbeider, die weer teruggeplaatst is in zijn vroegere positie van voorman in de kassen van het bedrijf en daarbij een landbouwkundig technicus vervangt. Deze terugplaatsing staat haaks op de heersende tendens om handarbeiders te vervangen door professioneel personeel. De tweede paragraaf meldt het geval van een zeer ervaren arbeider, die een internationale irrigatie-expert belachelijk maakte toen deze probeerde de voordelen te demonstreren van geavanceerde technologie en aan een groep technici en zakenmensen die bij hem een cursus volgden liet zien hoe nieuwe irrigatieinstallaties worden gebruikt. Deze situatie noodt tot een kritische reflectie op de lokale effecten van technologische veranderingen.

Hoofdstuk VI bespreekt 'de kracht van de ironie' meer gedetailleerd en onderzoekt drie situaties die zich voordeden tijdens de werkroutine en die gekenmerkt worden door verschillende betekenissen van ironie. Ik verklaar hoe het werk in de Autlán tomatenbedrijven kan worden voorgesteld als een tweeledig ironische sociale situatie: aan de ene kant gaat het meestal om deeltijd-arbeiders en over arbeiders die constant rondtrekken. Hun legale- en mensenrechten zijn niet verzekerd. Aan de andere kant kenmerken de trans-

ationale en lokale bedrijven zich als 'bedrijven op wielen', maar ze zijn niet in staat goede korte-termijn winsten te garanderen.

Het onderzoeken van de praktijk van ironie behelst ook bepaalde pogingen om de conceptuele uitingen en manieren van spreken bij hun interventie in het werkproces te beschrijven. We hebben hier niet te maken met individuele uitingen, maar met collectieve typeringen. Op een bepaalde manier delen arbeiders in de macht en op een andere manier tarten ze de macht, maar in de uiteindelijk analyse is te zien hoe ze de vervreemding van hun werkroutine transformeren. De ironie die ze aan de dag leggen is niet een macht met identieke modaliteiten of zelfs uniforme intensiteit. Het lijkt meer op een waterdruppel die langzaam maar zeker de steen uitholt.

Hoofdstuk VII beschouwt de conceptualisering van verandering in de leefwereld van de arbeiders. In zekere zin expliciteert het de dialoog tussen de etnografische bespiegelingen en de sociologische literatuur - waar in eerdere hoofdstukken al mee begonnen is. De eerste paragraaf onderzoekt zeer specifiek de betekenis van zowel gewone als ongewone veranderingen in de leefomstandigheden van de arbeiders. Onderzocht worden ook de bijdragen van theorieën die proberen meer inzicht te geven in veranderingsprocessen. In het kader van etnografische situaties worden de specifieke mogelijkheden besproken om verschillende macro- of micro-theoretische modellen te gebruiken voor het begrijpen van structurele veranderingen. De tweede paragraaf behandelt de bijdragen van de kant van de theorie van het werkproces. Gesteld wordt dat het noodzakelijk is de conceptuele focus te herzien en de grote verscheidenheid van disciplinaire regels binnen een bedrijf daarin op te nemen, alsmede de vormen van zelfregulatie en weerstand van de arbeiders. Er wordt ook aandacht besteed aan de verschillen in geslacht, klasse en leeftijd in formele en informele werkverbanden. De laatste paragraaf reconstrueert een etisch-politieke micro-orde in de specifieke omstandigheden van het werk in de tomatenbedrijven.

Hoofdstuk VIII is een neerslag van de dissertatie, waarin verschillende expliciete of impliciete pogingen om te komen tot een beschrijving van de 'agency' van arbeiders in eerdere hoofdstukken worden samengevat. Het begrip 'human agency' als naar voren gebracht in dit laatste hoofdstuk, gaat uit boven de concepties in de sociologische literatuur over landarbeiders, waarvan aangetoond is dat ze tot de zwakke plekken in die literatuur behoren. Ik betoog hier dat uitbuiting, sociale marginalisatie en ondergeschiktmaking niet slechts gezien moeten worden als beperkingen van 'human agency', maar dat ze, zo nodig, ook moeten worden geïnterpreteerd als uitdagingen die mensen er toe brengen boven de sociale conditionering uit te stijgen. In feite vertelt de manier waarop 'human agency' wordt begrepen ons dat het sociaal tot stand gekomen is en dat het zichzelf niet kan realiseren als een geïsoleerde component van

individuele keuze. Integendeel, 'human agency' manifesteert zich zelf altijd als een belichaming van georganiseerde groepspraktijken, en hierin ontwikkelen zich overtuigende en charismatische machten die andere sociale actoren aantrekken totdat ze kristalliseren in het uitoefenen van macht. Dit is weer het gevolg van verschillende vormen van betrokkenheid bij bepaalde projecten en belangen. Zelfs als de passiviteit van de arbeiders voortduurt, omdat ze verstrikt zitten in een bepaald machtsnetwerk, mag men niet de mogelijkheid over het hoofd zien dat ze gebruik maken van de macht van andere actoren, die op hun beurt ook weer vastzitten in hun eigen projecten. Men moet tenminste bedenken dat passiviteit nooit totaal is en dat de teugels van de macht in andere handen kunnen overgaan, al is het maar voor een ogenblik.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Luis Gabriel Torres was born on August 15, 1948, in Guadalajara, Jalisco Mexico. From 1965 to 1972 he studied Philosophy and Theology and obtained a *Licenciatura* (BA) degree in Philosophy in the Universidad del Valle de Atemajac in 1989.

From 1972 to 1986 he combined teaching and research with development work, as a member of the Institute for Rural Development Studies *Maya AC*, and other NGO's such as *EDOC* (*Educación y Desarrollo de Occidente*) and *Equipo Pueblo*. His work in rural communities entailed direct participation in the organizing processes of rural groups (small farmers and landless people) in Nayarit and Jalisco and he was legal advisor for an independent *Ejido* Union of the coast of Jalisco. He also worked in the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (*SARH*) where he was head of the department of producers for the irrigation district of Tomatlán. From 1981 to 1983 he was director of the programme "Peasant Education and Organization" in a southern region of Jalisco, jointly undertaken by *CEA* (*Centro de Estudios Agrarios*) *EDOC*. He also headed the project "Integral Health Systems in a Rural Context" - supported by the Interamerican Foundation - from 1984 to 1986. He later carried out consultancies and evaluations of rural development projects for *Development and Peace*, *HIVOS* and *GTZ*.

In terms of research, in 1987 he joined the project "Contrasting Patterns of Irrigation Organization: Peasant Strategies and Planned Intervention" coordinated by Prof. Norman Long from the Department of Rural Development Sociology of Wageningen Agricultural University. Within the framework of this project he started his Ph.D fieldwork research. In 1991 he carried out research within the project "Autonomy and Local Development on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua" in collaboration with *CIDCA* and Wageningen Agricultural University, and within the "Atiocoyo Project" in El Salvador in collaboration with the *GTZ*.

Gabriel Torres published several articles and reports about fieldwork experiences and organizing processes between 1974 and 1986. In 1987, he published the book "*La Búsqueda del sujeto social*" Ed. Pueblo, Mexico. In 1990 he published an article in the *European Review of Latin American Studies* entitled: *Metiéndose al ajo: Los retos metodológicos de una intervención sociológica*. In 1991 and 1992, he published with Noreen White, Roberto

Rigby, Kevin Campbell and Ronnie Vernooy "*Si el mercado manda para qué queremos gobierno*" WANI No. 11, and with Ronnie Vernooy "*Mujeres Comerciantes y Política: La Reconstrucción Social del mercado de Bluefields*" WANI No. 12.

At present he is working in *CIESAS-OCCIDENTE* in Guadalajara doing research in rural areas dealing with issues of local power, globalization, productive restructuring and neoliberal policies. On these topics he has recently published "*El Barzón: Por la dignidad de los agroprodutores*", *Revista Coyuntura* No. 43-44 and is preparing "*La reestructuración del campo Jalisciense*" for publication in the *Revista Ensayos Jaliscienses*.